

Minnesota State Parks

*"Everyone's
Country Estate"*



**Strategic
Plan
2006 - 2011**





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A Letter from the Division Director:

Making Minnesota State Parks, “Everyone’s Country Estate”

The subtitle of this plan, “Everyone’s Country Estate”, has a special meaning for those familiar with the history of Minnesota’s state parks. It was a favorite phrase of Judge Clarence R. Magney, an early and very influential supporter of state parks. A lawyer, jurist, former mayor of Duluth, Minnesota and associate justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court, Judge Magney personally advocated for the establishment of many state parks in the park system today, especially those along the shore of Lake Superior. He foresaw that state parks should, in his words, serve as everyman’s country estate - their natural beauty and recreational qualities preserved for all citizens. Judge C.R. Magney State Park, along Lake Superior’s shore, was named in his honor.

It is our goal to follow Judge Magney’s vision and truly make Minnesota State Parks “Everyone’s Country Estate.”

In our rapidly changing world we are seeing many trends that will impact our state parks and how people recreate:

- Minnesota’s population will grow by 27% from 2000 to 2030, bringing more development pressure to natural lands and additional demand for recreational opportunities.
- Minnesota’s population is getting older – the average age will increase from 35.4 years in 2000 to 40.2 years by 2030. As people get older, visits to state parks decline, as does participation in other outdoor activities.
- Minnesota will grow more racially and ethnically diverse – the state’s Hispanic and non-white population will nearly double to 19% in 2030. These groups have traditionally been less connected with state parks and other outdoor recreation sites.
- Minnesota is growing more urban and suburban – residents from these areas participate less in outdoor recreation, including visiting state parks.
- People are more connected via technology – the intranet, cell phones, GPS, etc. Many people expect to stay connected while recreating, or use technology as part of their recreation experience. Approximately 70% of the population uses technology for trip planning.

These trends and other demographic and social changes occurring in Minnesota and throughout the country will have an important impact on our efforts in the coming years.

Author Richard Louv, in his book “Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder,” cites a growing body of knowledge that shows the value of connecting with the natural world and how that connection provides an antidote to many of the problems that ail our children today.

Nearly a century ago Luther Standing Bear, a member of the Lakota Indian tribe, said “Man’s heart, away from nature, becomes hard; (the Lakota) knew that lack of respect for growing, living things soon led to lack of respect for humans too.”

For those who wish to reverse the impacts of these trends and encourage a reconnection with nature, it is important to think strategically and act swiftly. We, in the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Division of Parks and Recreation, have created a six-year Strategic Plan to allow us to act and respond quickly during this time of dynamic change. What remains constant, however, are the goals of our three-part state park mission to preserve Minnesota’s original landscapes, provide abundant outdoor recreation opportunities and educate park visitors and the public about Minnesota’s natural and cultural heritage. The Division strategic plan links with the DNR’s [A Strategic Conservation Agenda](#), illustrating the Division’s contributions to the Department’s priorities.

The Plan

The Strategic Plan we have developed focuses on five core areas including the challenges within each of the three mission areas, the changing workforce and the administrative structure needed to provide a park system.

Although we face many challenges, within those challenges lie opportunities:

- The opportunity to find new ways to draw visitors to state parks, understand the barriers that may be keeping them away and explore what we might do better or differently to attract new users.
- The opportunity to use visitor services and interpretive activities to explore creative means of reaching the younger generation and underserved populations.
- The opportunity to preserve Minnesota's original landscapes for future generations.
- The opportunity to attract, hire, train and retrain an invigorated work force that is representative of the population of the state and will enable us to connect with diverse groups.
- The opportunity to think differently about how we can provide services in the most efficient manner that will best serve the citizens of this state.

It is exciting to think that we can work together toward reversing the downward trend of the public's connection to nature and the outdoors and provide citizens with their own "country estate" experience in state parks. In Minnesota we have the unique situation of many local friends groups associated with individual state parks and a strong citizen-supported organization, the Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota, to work with us to carry out these goals. Within the DNR, we will work with other divisions and bureaus to be more efficient in the delivery of our services.

Implementation

We feel we have set a strategic direction for the most significant issues facing Minnesota's state park system in the near future. As with any strategic planning effort, the process itself of identifying issues and challenges, setting priorities and staying grounded in core mission values is beneficial. We will craft three biennial workplans that focus on the issues and strategies, the action steps and measurable outcomes. A summary of the strategic plan and copy of the first biennial workplan is included with this document. We are committed to having a strategic plan that is action oriented and provides every citizen in Minnesota the opportunity for outdoor recreation experiences.

Thank you for your interest in Minnesota's state parks.



Courtland Nelson, Director
Division of Parks and Recreation

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the state park friends groups and other individuals that reviewed the goals and strategies portions of the strategic plan. Their comments served as a way for the Division to check in with state park visitors and supporters on the direction and priorities set out in the strategic plan. And thank you to these people also for their continued interest in and support for state parks.

Thank you to the Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota for reviewing the strategic plan, and their comments especially concerning the future needs for state parks. As it has for over fifty years, the Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota remains a valuable partner for achieving the Division's preservation, recreation and interpretive mission.

Thank you to the Department of Natural Resources staff who provided input and comments during the development of the strategic plan, especially members of the Department's Office of Management and Budget Services: Terri Yearwood for her assistance with designing the planning process and meeting facilitation, Tim Kelly for his expertise on social and recreational trends, and Keith Wendt and Laura Preus for their advice on linking the Division's strategic plan with the Department's A Strategic Conservation Agenda.

And finally, thank you to the staff of the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation for the time and energy they committed to the strategic planning effort, from its earliest information-gathering stages, through the prioritization of the goals and strategies, to the development of the biennial workplans and the unit and program workplans that will implement the direction set out in the strategic plan.

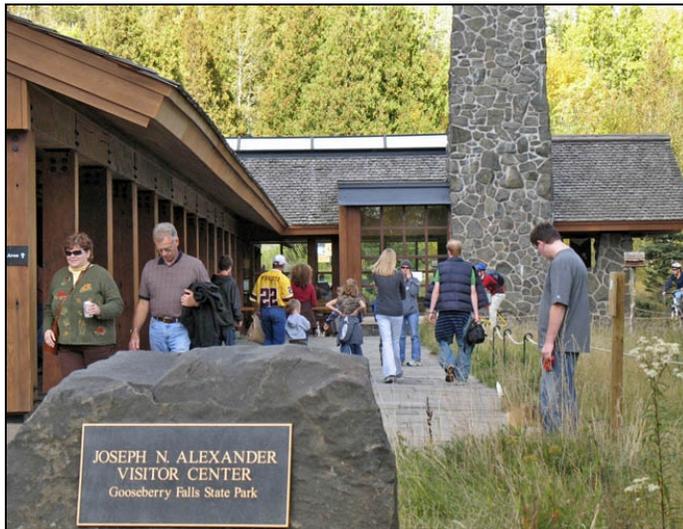


Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Mission Statement

The mission of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is to work with citizens to conserve and manage the state's natural resources, to provide outdoor recreation opportunities, and to provide for commercial uses of natural resources in a way that creates a sustainable quality of life.

DNR Division of Parks and Recreation Mission Statement

We will work with the people of Minnesota to provide a state park system which preserves and manages Minnesota's natural, scenic and cultural resources for present and future generations while providing appropriate recreational and educational opportunities.



What is Minnesota State Parks?

Minnesota State Parks is the common name often used to refer to the units operated by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Division of Parks and Recreation.

These units include:

- *State parks*
- *State recreation areas*
- *State waysides*

The Division of Parks and Recreation also oversees the operation of forest recreation areas, including both campgrounds and day use sites, within Minnesota's state forests.

The purposes and characteristics of the various units of the system are described in Minnesota Statutes Chapter 86A, known as the Outdoor Recreation Act (the statute is included in Appendix D).

The Division of Parks and Recreation is one unit within the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The Department's focus encompasses providing high-quality recreation opportunities, providing economic opportunities for resource industries, and preserving important features of the state's natural and cultural heritage. DNR programs include fish and wildlife habitat improvement, fire management, mineral potential research, management of public lands and waters, and many others – all designed to provide sustainable benefits to Minnesotans now and into the future.

Time period:

This strategic plan provides direction for a six-year period, through 2011.

Links:

Important elements in this strategic plan are how it links to broader Department level efforts, such as the DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda and State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), as well as to more targeted Division level efforts such as two-year Division workplans, annual program workplans and park unit workplans.

Implementation:

Implementation of the strategic plan will be achieved through workplans. This strategic plan-workplan link means the strategic directions identified in this plan will be funneled directly into how the Division plans its work and allocates its resources. A copy of the first two-year Division workplan is included in the front of this document.

Who is the Division Management Team?

The Division Management Team is the senior staff that serves as the decision-making group for the Division. This group includes the four regional managers, Park Development and Real Estate manager, Planning, IT and Marketing manager, Human Resources and Legislative Manager, Business Manager, Deputy Director and the Division Director.

Introduction

The strategic plan for the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation expired in 2005. It is time for a new strategic plan to guide the Division. This is the opportunity to take a close look at mission priorities, service delivery and the future of our human resources that make it all happen.

The Division Management Team determined that this will be an issues-driven strategic plan that will span six years. It will be broken down into two-year workplans that will be tied to the DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda and the state's biennial budget cycle.

A summary of the strategic plan and a copy of the first two-year workplan are included at the front of this document.

Guiding principles:

- We have a commitment to mission.
- We will develop a plan that addresses the highest priorities for the Division.
- We will integrate strategies with the DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda.
- We will strive to serve current and future citizens of this state in a manner that illustrates wise use of funding.
- We will focus on customers – both current and future generations.
- We value our human resources and strive to provide a positive, supportive work environment.
- We are committed to communicating effectively.
- We will develop outcome-based and measurable results as a follow up to the strategic direction.
- We will foster and practice stewardship of our resources.
- We will provide a safe work environment for our employees and visitors.

Purpose:

- Emphasize effective and efficient service delivery to our visitors.
- Establish a coherent mission-driven budget prioritization system.
- Identify the present and future human resource needs of the Division.
- Assure that the natural and cultural windows on Minnesota's landscape are preserved and interpreted.
- Assess infrastructure needs to serve visitors and protect natural and cultural resources.
- Maintain the current customer base and increase and diversify visitorship.

Minnesota State Parks – At a Glance

Minnesota's state park system is administered by the Department of Natural Resources Division of Parks and Recreation. The state park system includes 66 state parks, 6 state recreation areas, and 8 state waysides. In addition, the Division also administers 46 state forest campgrounds and day use areas. (See Appendix B: Figure 1)

Encompassing 267,300 acres, the state park system represents less than ½ of 1% of all the land in Minnesota. About 51,000 acres of land within state parks remains in private ownership.

Minnesota Statutes Chapters 85 and 86A describe the three-part mission of the state park system:

- preserve the natural and cultural resources of the state
- educate visitors through interpretation
- provide recreational opportunities without impairment for the enjoyment and recreation of future generations.

Resources

Minnesota's state park system provides "windows on Minnesota's landscapes," preserving and restoring representative examples of the natural landscapes of the state. The Division has an active resource management program to protect, preserve and restore cultural resources and natural areas. Management activities include prescribed fire in prairie and woodland communities, prairie restoration, hardwood and pine reforestation, non-native species control, wetland restoration, and archaeological investigations. Resource projects are conducted on approximately 8,000 acres annually.

Facilities

The state park system includes a wide variety of recreational use and visitor service facilities including:

- 5,717 campsites
- 223 horse campsites
- 75 group camps
- 1,255 miles of trail
- 6,526 picnic sites
- 40 beaches
- 33 fishing piers
- 34 visitor centers
- 135 water access sites
- 332 miles of roads
- 72 bridges
- 1,600 buildings
- 62 historic districts and landmarks

Each unit of the state park system provides a mix of recreation and educational opportunities suited to its natural and cultural resource base.

Visitors

In 2005, the state park system hosted almost 8,245,000 visitors, including nearly 935,000 campers and other overnight guests. Eighty-four percent of the visitors to state parks are Minnesota residents. *Some 30% of all Minnesotans visit a state park each year – over 1.5 million people.*

Nine of the 35 most-visited Minnesota tourism attractions are in state parks. Places like the Mississippi River headwaters in Itasca State Park,

"The legislature of this state has provided for the creation and establishment of state parks, designated monuments, recreation reserves and waysides for the purpose of conserving the scenery, natural and historic objects and wildlife and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

*Minnesota Statutes Chapter 85.011**

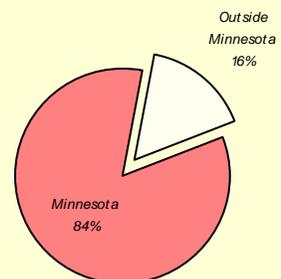
Minnesota state parks' mission:

- Preserve resources
- Educate visitors
- Provide recreation opportunities

Minnesota's state parks host approximately 8 million visitors annually.

Each year, 30% of all Minnesotans visit a state park – over 1.5 million people.

State Park Visitor Origin



** Portions of Minnesota Statutes Chapters 85 and 86A relating to the Minnesota State Park system are included in Appendix D.*

Nine of the 35 most-visited tourism attractions in Minnesota are in state parks.

Satisfaction with visits to state parks:

Exceeded expectations	21%
Completely satisfied	56%
Mostly satisfied	+ 18%
	95%

Economic impact of park visitors:
(spending per person/per day)

Day users	\$25.04
Overnight users	\$28.84

State park visitors spent over \$196 million statewide in 2005.

Department of Natural Resources
Regions and Regional Offices:



Fort Snelling, and the scenic state parks along Minnesota’s north shore of Lake Superior are major attractions for people from within Minnesota, neighboring states, and throughout the country.

The most popular activities for visitors to state parks are hiking, sightseeing, and nature observation. Water-based activities, such as fishing and boating, are also popular at many state parks.

The state park system consistently provides quality experiences for visitors, earning a “satisfied” or better ranking from 95% of visitors. Visitor satisfaction has increased since the Division of Parks and Recreation began measuring the indicator in the late 1980s. The many repeat visitors to state parks also illustrates that people are happy with their experience and choose to come back. State park visitors visit a state park on average 4 times a year.

The state park system is also a significant economic boost to local communities. Visitor spending while on trips to state parks contributed over \$196 million to the economy statewide last year. This represents money spent at local businesses for items like gasoline and groceries as well as for lodging and dining out. The figure *does not* include money collected by state parks for park entrance fees, camping fees, or any other park fees.

Organization

The Division of Parks and Recreation is part of the Department of Natural Resources. The Department is organized into four regions, with a Central Office located in St. Paul and regional offices located in Bemidji, Grand Rapids, St. Paul, and New Ulm.

The Division has 175 full-time employees and 700 part-time employees spread between park units, the four regional offices, and the Division’s central office. (See Appendix B: Figure 2).



Trends That Impact the Department and Division

Many changes are occurring in the state and throughout the country that will affect the Department and the Division of Park and Recreation's ability to pursue its mission. Several important trends and their potential impacts are summarized below.

Climate change is affecting resources and recreational opportunities.

Climate change is anticipated to have significant long-term impacts in Minnesota. Among the changes Minnesota is forecast to experience are shorter winters and earlier springs, higher minimum temperatures, more variable precipitation, and more extreme storm events. These changes will mean shifts in native plant and animal ranges, including the possible loss of iconic species such as moose, and likely worsen invasive and non-native species problems. These changes may impact the Division's ability to restore native plant and animal communities that were present before Euro-American settlement and to protect rare, threatened and endangered species. Climate changes may also impact the recreational opportunities offered at state parks. Shorter winters and less reliable snowfall may mean reduced opportunities for winter activities like skiing and snowmobiling but also possibly longer seasons for camping and other warm weather activities.

Minnesota's population is aging.

The median age of Minnesota residents is increasing and older people are making up a greater part of the state population. The median age will increase from 35 years in 2000 to 40 years in 2030. Two-thirds of all the state's population growth from 2000 to 2030 will be among the 60 years and older age groups. Older people tend to recreate less overall. The activities they participate in change, as do their abilities in those activities they continue to pursue. It will be important for the Division to identify what activities and experiences remain popular with these individuals, and what changes in our facilities may be necessary to continue to accommodate them. At the same time, the numbers of young people and families with young children will stay relatively the same, continuing demands for activities that interest them. The Division is also impacted directly as the aging population is reflected in an aging workforce. Replacing the skills and experience of retiring workers is an important task for the years ahead.

Minnesota is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse.

The minority population within the state is growing. Growth in minority groups will account for over half of the state's population increase between 2000 and 2030. Minorities participate less in most nature-based outdoor recreation activities, including visiting state parks. In 2001, only 4% of state park visitors identified themselves as non-white and/or Hispanic, while representing close to 10% of the state's residents. The concentration of minority groups in urban areas may account for a portion of this under-representation since most state park opportunities are located outside the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The Division should consider how to reach out to these groups to communicate our mission and the recreational opportunities offered in state parks, as well as to learn what experiences these groups are seeking or barriers they face to visiting state parks.

Where does this information come from?

The trends and related statistics in this section are derived from various sources, including the National Park Service, the 2000 Census, the Minnesota State Demographers Office, and various Minnesota Department of Natural Resources reports on recreational trends, resident surveys and state park visitor surveys. Citations for these sources are included in Appendix C.

Many Department reports are available online at the DNR website:

www.mndnr.gov/aboutdnr/reports/index.html

Minnesotans 60 years old or older:
(percent of total population)

2000 Census	16%
2030 projection	26%

The first baby-boomers turned 60 years old in 2005.

Minnesota's race and ethnicity:
(Hispanic and/or non-white as percent of total population)

2000 Census	10%
2030 projection	19%

The percent of the state's population in these groups will nearly double.

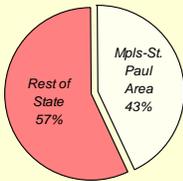
Proportion of National Park visitation among persons in mid-teens to mid-thirties:

1989-90 survey	27%
2003-04 survey	19%

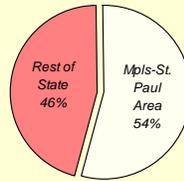
Percent of park visits and state population from Minneapolis-St. Paul area: (Minnesota visitors only)

Park Visits	43%
Total Population	54%

State Park Visits



State Population



People are participating less in nature-based outdoor recreation.

Per-capita participation across a wide range of activities is falling, including visiting state parks. People remark on having less free time and living more fractured lives: time is divided among longer work hours, more scheduled activities for their children as well as themselves, shorter vacations, and other entertainment opportunities. Drop-off in participation is especially acute among younger adults - 16 years to 34 years. Visitation to national parks shows similar declines in this group. Is there a chance that a generation is being lost by nature-based outdoor recreation? Can these individuals (and the children they raise) be expected to find these activities again later in life? Without experiences in outdoor activities and state parks in particular, can the Division expect these individuals to be interested in or support its mission in the future?

Minnesota is becoming more urban, suburban.

Population growth over the last 20 years has occurred largely in metropolitan areas, primarily in the suburban areas around Minneapolis-St. Paul and regional growth centers. Sixty percent of the state's growth from today until 2030 is forecast for the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area. Metropolitan area residents participate less than non-metro area residents in most nature-based outdoor recreation activities, including visiting state parks. The increasing urbanization is breaking a link of social learning that in the past has driven participation in some nature-based outdoor recreation activities. Skills and experiences with these activities are often built at an early age and fostered by family connections to the land or more rural settings where these activities occur. Fewer connections to family farms, lake cabins, rural landscapes and similar places mean fewer opportunities to participate and learn skills that are then sustained throughout life. The Division will need to consider how to connect or reconnect people with places and opportunities to learn skills and have experiences that will build lifelong state park visitors.



State Park per-capita visitation is declining.

Visitation to state parks has been relatively stable over the last ten years while the state's population has grown significantly. Per-capita visitation to state parks has actually decreased. Visitation has not kept pace with population growth, and is even less likely to do so in the future given the increasing age and diversity of the population. A continuing flat visitation or possibly lower visitation in the future may mean fee-based revenue will drop, further stressing the Division's ability to pursue its resource, interpretation, and recreation mission objectives.

Health is a concern for many Minnesotans.

Health issues are affecting people of all ages. People are living increasingly sedentary lifestyles. Less exercise, indoor recreation alternatives such as TV, video games, and the Internet, and other factors are contributing to a less healthy lifestyle for many Minnesotans. Health professions are warning of growing incidences of obesity and associated diseases like diabetes and heart disease. State parks provide people with recreational opportunities such as walking, hiking, and bicycling as well as relaxation and exposure to the outdoors that can contribute to better health and a greater sense of well-being.

Development continues to spread in suburban and exurban areas.

As development continues throughout the state, in both metropolitan areas and rural areas, opportunities to preserve or restore natural landscapes, protect and interpret historic sites, or provide recreational opportunities are lost. Land prices near metropolitan areas and in many scenic places are becoming prohibitive for government acquisition. Creating any new opportunities near growing urban centers where visitation to state parks is the most underrepresented is becoming increasingly difficult.

Technology is becoming more prevalent and important.

Technology has become a fact of life. People expect to be able to stay "connected" via their cell phones, laptop computers, and other mobile devices. Technology-based recreation, such as geocaching and GPS orienteering, are growing in popularity. Technology also provides a method for the Division to share information about its services and programs - providing park maps and other information online as well as online reservations for campsites and other facilities. The Division's website receives over 6 million hits a year, and online reservations have risen to over half of all camping reservations. However, providing cell phone coverage, Internet access, WiFi access, and other technology services presents infrastructure and experiential issues. How will the Division balance visitor expectations for connectivity and solitude? How will the Division fund the installation and maintenance of the infrastructure for the connectivity it decides to provide? How can the Division provide services via technology in ways that complement its mission?

General fund support for the state park system is declining.

The Division's budget to operate the state park system has increased over the last ten years, while funding from the state's general fund has declined. The overall budget increase of the last decade was fueled initially by an increase in general funds, then with the addition of state lottery proceeds

*Decline in per-capita visitation to state parks:
(index year 2005 equals 100)*

1995	112
2000	108
2005	100

In Minnesota, 59% of adults are overweight and fewer than half of all adults get the recommended amount of exercise or physical activity. Nationwide, 17% of children 2-19 years of age are overweight.

Each day in Minnesota an average of 170 acres of natural land is converted for development.

Technology ownership and use:

- *73% of adults use the internet (16% in 1995)*
- *73% of adults own cell phones (45% of teens)*
- *30% of adults own laptops (32% of teens)*
- *20% of adults own MP3 players (47% of teens)*
- *Minnesota State Parks' website receives over 6 million hits annually*

Operations funding sources:

- *State general fund*
- *State lottery proceeds*
- *Park-generated revenue (permits, fees, merchandise sales, etc.)*

Division of Parks and Recreation's operating budget for 2005 was \$28.6 million - \$16.2 million from the state's general fund, \$3.5 million from state lottery proceeds, and \$8.9 from a dedicated account funded by state park-generated revenue.

(called lottery-in-lieu funds) and the creation of a dedicated account funded by state park-generated revenue. The creation of the revenue-funded dedicated account resulted in a similar-sized reduction in the general fund allocation to the Division. With the addition of these other funding sources, general fund support declined in unadjusted dollars below the 1996 funding level.

Although the Division's budget today is higher than in 1996, the recent trend has been downward. Since peaking in 2003, the Division's overall budget has declined, even with the addition of the lottery-in-lieu and dedicated account funds. In addition, the Division's budget is further eroded by inflation, a roughly \$1 million reduction in purchasing power each year.

New responsibilities, including the operation of the forest recreation areas and two new state recreation areas, have put additional strain on the Division's budget. Like all other government agencies and private businesses, the Division also faces rising material and labor costs, including escalating health care costs.

While a diversity of funding sources is healthy, the growing dependency on fee-generated funds compounded with a potential decrease in visitation as outlined above points to additional budget difficulties for the Division in meeting its mission objectives.



The Six-Year Strategic Plan

The Division of Parks and Recreation’s strategic plan is intended to provide guidance to the Division for the next six years. This is a shorter “lifespan” than typical for some strategic plans, although more agencies are moving toward this approach to maintain flexibility in a rapidly changing environment. The Division considered longer-term trends as part of the planning process, but especially during strategy development and prioritization focused on the more immediate six-year horizon. The strategic plan represents the first six years of work to address these long-range trends.

The Core Areas

The Strategic Plan is divided into five core areas:

- Mission: Interpretation
- Mission: Natural and Cultural Resources
- Mission: Recreation
- Human Resources
- Administration

These core areas represent the three elements of the Division of Parks and Recreation mission as set out in state statute as well as two areas that are important to the Division’s ability to deliver that mission – its human resources and administrative structure.

Each core area includes a desired outcomes statement, a series of goals, and strategies for each goal that have been devised to date to help the Division achieve its desired outcome.

There are links between the Goals and Core Areas that illustrate how work in one area will benefit other areas. For example, interpretive programs and displays can aid the Division’s resource program by educating the public about the Division’s natural and cultural resource protection mandate. Taking advantage of this and other links among the plan goals will work as multipliers to the Division’s efforts.

The core areas do not include action statements for the strategies set out in the strategic plan. The strategic plan will be implemented through the development of three two-year work plans that will link the goals of the strategic plan with the Division’s biennial budget planning and other legislative proposals, as well as the park unit resource workplans and annual workplans. The first of the three two-year workplans was developed in conjunction with the completion of the strategic plan. (See Implementation – A Road Map for Achieving Strategic Goals.)

Why a six-year strategic plan?

Several issues contributed to the Division’s decision to adopt a six-year “lifespan” for its strategic plan:

- *Rapid pace of change – especially related to technology for providing services to the public.*
- *Significant human resource changes – large number of retirements and new hires will change the makeup of the organization as well as provide opportunities to realign staff resources.*
- *Budget uncertainties – the Division continues to face an uncertain budget future. The shorter-term plan meshes with the state’s two-year budget cycle.*

The shorter-term lifespan of the strategic plan acknowledges these uncertainties and represents the Division’s intent to continue to evaluate and adjust to the changing organizational, social, and political environments.

The goals and strategies for Interpretation were derived from the Division's Interpretive Services Strategic Direction document (January 2004). The Minnesota State Park System Interpretive Services Plan (1995) continues to serve as the Division's long-range guidance document for interpretive services.

What does the Division mean by interpretation?

The Division provides learning opportunities for visitors, focused on the natural and cultural resources found in state parks, as well as recreation-related programs.

These opportunities are presented in a variety of ways: guided experiences such as naturalist-led talks, hikes, and evening campfire programs, and self-guided experiences such as interpretive trails, brochures, audio-visual programs, exhibits and other displays.

Over one million people attend an interpretive program or visit a state park visitor center each year.

Interpretation facts and figures:

- 34 visitor centers (6 new centers in the last 10 years)
- 98.4 miles of self-guided interpretive trails
- Numerous interpretive kiosks and displays throughout the system

Mission: Interpretation

Background:

The Division's interpretive services mission as set out in the Minnesota State Park System Interpretive Services Plan is: "To provide accessible interpretive services which create a sense of stewardship for Minnesota's natural and cultural heritage by illuminating the changing relationships between people and landscapes over time."

The Division has clear responsibilities in this area as spelled out in MS86A.05 subd.c "...preserve, perpetuate, and interpret natural features that existed in the area of the park prior to settlement and other significant natural, scenic, scientific, or historic features that are present . . . Programs to interpret the natural features of the park shall be provided."

Interpretation is one of the core missions as established in statute. However, this mission area has changed significantly during recent budget appropriations. Naturalist-led interpretive service levels have changed in over 30 state parks. Overall program participation by visitors has remained fairly stable, with the loss in naturalist program attendance being replaced by visitor center attendance. It is estimated that about one in six visitors to state parks has an interpretive experience.

Desired Outcomes:

The Division will continue to be innovative in providing interpretive programming to state park visitors through proven and non-traditional methods, broaden its reach of visitors that benefit from interpretive services, strengthen the role of interpretive services in visitor education and management, attract new visitors to state parks and expand the cooperative education efforts within the Department.

Goals:

1. **To carry out the statutory mandate of providing interpretive programs for park visitors to the best of the Division's ability.**

Strategies:

- Establish clear priorities within the interpretive program.
- Review and update the Minnesota State Park System Interpretive Services Plan (1995) regarding interpretive staffing priorities (See Appendix B: Figure 3).
- Provide more self-guided interpretation at state parks without naturalists.
- Design projects for landscape areas or groupings of parks whenever possible and use interpretive project work teams on statewide or region-wide projects.
- Utilize volunteer presenters, guest speakers and special program series to add variety, interest and increase the number of programs offered.
- Identify interpretive projects that have broad-based applications such as books about state parks, state park education trunks, checklists, website information and natural plant community interpretation.
- Develop more web-based delivery of services and expand the use of technology to reach visitors.

- Develop relationships with local high schools and universities to provide secondary and post-secondary outdoor education experiences and as a source for interns, student workers, and seasonal employees.
- Consider adding low-cost alternative methods such as using volunteers to help provide visitor information.
- Make a commitment to design new visitor centers to be as efficient as possible in terms of staff operation.
- Explore alternative funding sources.
- Consider charging fees for certain value-added programs to pay for staffing and program materials.

2. Provide the type and content of interpretive services that the public desires and attract new visitors to state parks through interpretive services while maintaining a focus on resource stewardship.

Strategies:

- Work with marketing staff to assess methods of interpretive service delivery desired by current visitors.
- Work with marketing staff to determine what types of services and programs would attract new visitors.
- Work in partnership with the DNR Office of Management and Budget Services and the University of Minnesota to evaluate the effectiveness of interpretive services.

3. Assist in fulfilling the Division's recreation and resource management missions.

Strategies:

- Provide visitor management information and address park management and resource management issues through programs and materials.
- Develop interpretive activities that incorporate recreational experiences.



A shifting balance between guided and self-guided opportunities:

The reduction of interpretive staff has resulted in fewer programs being offered and therefore fewer guided or personal interpretive experiences for park visitors. The addition of more self-guided opportunities – such as new visitor centers, additional interpretive trails, and kiosks – means that the total number of interpretive experiences for park visitors has remained stable.

However, many repeat visitors to state parks have remarked that the loss of interpretive staff and programs has negatively impacted the quality of their visit.

In determining what the public wants for interpretive services, the Division will need to consider the changing character of the public:

- Increasingly urban and suburban
- More age and ethnic diversity

The Division must consider both the content and methods it will use to reach this changing audience.

Teaching skills that build users:

Interpretive programs on outdoor skills instruction (such as camping skills, naturalist skills, orienteering) is one possible way for the Division to attract new visitors and build lifetime users of state parks. These programs would teach skills less common among the increasingly urban population and form personal connections to those places where the skills were learned – Minnesota's state parks.

DNR's Strategic Conservation Agenda:

The Department of Natural Resources' A Strategic Conservation Agenda sets a series of indicators and targets for the Department's projects and programs. The Division contributes to many of the agenda priority areas, including:

- *Terrestrial invasive plant species*
- *Shoreland habitat conservation*
- *Prairie wetland complexes*
- *Frog and toad distribution*
- *Topeka shiner distribution*
- *Wildlife observation and birding*
- *Wetlands quantity, quality, and biological diversity*
- *Old-growth forests*

The Strategic Conservation Agenda also includes several state park-specific indicators:

- *Number of acres protected within statutory park boundaries*
- *Percent satisfied with a visit to a Minnesota state park*
- *Acres of natural vegetation actively maintained or restored in the state park system*
- *Maintenance and restoration of historic buildings, structures, and districts within state parks*
- *Percentage of park visitors participating in outdoor education activities*

A Strategic Conservation Agenda is available online at the DNR website:

www.mndnr.gov/aboutdnr/reports/index.html

4. Integrate interpretive services with marketing and merchandising efforts.

Strategies:

- Work with marketing staff on developing recommendations for annual themes.
- Develop interpretive programming around annual themes.
- Work with the merchandise program annually to develop and purchase products that support the themes and programming.
- Work with the marketing program on new and innovative means to reach visitors and promote programs.

5. Further the Department's Strategic Conservation Agenda.

Strategies:

- Incorporate Departmental mission, goals, priorities, key messages and initiatives in the Division's guided and self-guided services where appropriate.
- Promote interpretive services facilities, staff, resources and audiences to other divisions as a cost-effective method for delivering messages to the public.
- Invite other Department staff to supplement interpretive programs as guest speakers, and encourage Division interpretive staff to share their talents as subject matter experts to other divisions.
- Provide interpretive staff experience and expertise in designing and creating exhibits, displays, signs and audio/visual productions to assist staff in other divisions.



Mission: Natural and Cultural Resources Management

Background:

Natural and cultural resource management is a clear area of responsibility for the Division as spelled out in MS s86A.05 subd. 2c. The statute mandates that state parks be managed to preserve, perpetuate and interpret the natural features that existed at the time of Euro-American settlement, and other significant natural, scenic, scientific or historic features present. In addition, state parks are to maintain a balance of plant and animal life and re-introduce desirable species that are now missing. The Division will work to implement the DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda vision for natural lands – “remaining natural ecosystems will be conserved” and “degraded habitats will be restored.”

State parks provide windows on Minnesota’s past. Visitors can experience today what early settlers found when they pioneered this new country and how the Native Americans experienced the land they lived with over two hundred years ago. Although the Division can point to some outstanding successes, there is still a tremendous amount of effort needed to restore and maintain the natural and cultural resources consistent with statutory direction. A complementary companion piece is being developed to establish consistent operational guidance for resource management across the state park system.

Cultural resources have additional statutory mandates in MS s307.08, the Minnesota Private Cemeteries Act and MS s138, the Minnesota Historic Sites Act. The National Historic Preservation Act (36 CFR Part 800) applies under some circumstances as well. Historically, the Division has undertaken cultural resource activities primarily in response to development projects.

Desired Outcomes:

The Division will have a common understanding of desired future conditions and a plan, timeline and cost estimates for achieving and maintaining those conditions. The Division will have a comprehensive description of what needs to be inventoried for good decision-making and a system developed to prioritize these inventory needs both amongst the inventories themselves and the other important work in the resource program. The Division will have tools to measure success. Visitors to state parks and citizens of Minnesota will have an increased appreciation for and understanding of the natural and cultural heritage in their state parks.

Goals:

- 1. To maintain or restore presettlement conditions as required by MS s86A, subd. 2c, the Division needs to know what was present during this time period compared to what exists today. A reasonably good database of presettlement conditions exists as part of the Public Land Survey (PLS). The missing piece is a complete picture of today’s conditions. The Division will determine the inventory needs of the state park system; develop a process for prioritizing and conducting those inventories while still maintaining important restoration and management efforts.**

What is meant by pre-settlement conditions?

The Division manages state parks to the extent possible to preserve, maintain, or restore the native plant communities, associated wildlife and other natural resources that would have been present prior to European settlement.

Information on what natural communities and species were present is drawn from a variety of sources, including Marschner’s summary map of the Public Lands Survey, Government Land Office surveyor line notes, species range maps and historic references such as T.S. Robert’s Birds of Minnesota. Information from experts on various species is also used.

The goal of pre-settlement conditions is applied to most of the state park system’s non-developed areas. However, some areas are managed for particular cultural resource values. For example, Glacial Gardens in Interstate State Park is managed to resemble its historic appearance from the 1890s. At Hill Annex Mine State Park, vegetation is managed to facilitate the appearance and interpretation of the site as a working iron mine.

Natural resource facts and figures:

- Prescribed burns conducted on 5,600 acres annually.*
- Natural community restoration/maintenance efforts (invasives control, native species plantings) on 6,240 acres annually.*
- 280 federal or state endangered, threatened or special concern-listed species at over 1,500 locations.*

What is land cover mapping?

Land cover mapping is identifying and drawing boundaries for all native plant communities, undeveloped non-native areas (old agricultural fields) and developed sites (campgrounds, picnic areas) in a state park. It aids the Division in documenting its needs and successes in managing its units toward the desired future conditions for each area.

Desired future conditions (dfc) for many areas will be pre-settlement conditions, while other areas may be managed to reflect a historic period or developed and maintained for visitor use.

What are resource standard hours?

Resource standard hours are the portion of staff resources at each unit that are to be allocated to work on resource management activities, versus facility maintenance or customer service activities, etc.

The current funding for resource standard hours is 17% of what is needed to maintain existing natural and cultural resources in the system.

Funding sources:

Funds for resource projects – restoration efforts separate from management activities conducted using resource standard hours – come from four main sources:

- *Dedicated account funds (park-generated revenue)*
- *State lottery proceeds or lottery-in-lieu funds*
- *State bonding funds*
- *Outside grants*

Strategies:

- List the natural resource inventory needs of the system.
- Develop criteria for prioritizing the inventories.
- Complete land cover maps for all units.
- Develop desired future conditions for all units.
- Address impacts of climate change during establishment of desired future conditions and other long-range resource management planning efforts.
- Develop criteria for determining the importance of inventory work as it relates to ongoing resource management activities.
- Coordinate statewide inventory needs with annual work planning for resource specialists and park managers.
- Make better use of technology (GIS) to facilitate inventory work.
- Expand citizen science efforts where appropriate.

2. Develop a system to estimate full funding for the resource program in order to fulfill the statutory mandate.

Strategies:

- Define what it would take in terms of staff time, material costs and contracts to fully inventory current system and complete land cover mapping.
- Determine the cost to establish desired future conditions.
- Define what it would take in terms of staff time, material costs and contracts to take all units from their current condition to desired future conditions.
- Once full-funding level is determined, design a clear set of program priorities that guide the Division toward reestablishing or maintaining desired future conditions.



3. Develop criteria and processes to establish project priorities within the resource management program.

Strategies:

- Complete Resource Management guidance document.
- Develop individual park resource management plans that will be used as part of the park management plans, set priorities and serve as a guide for annual work planning.
- Use park resource management plans to develop annual work plans.
- Develop region resource management plans to set priorities.

4. Coordinate with other divisions within the Department for mutually beneficial outcomes.

Strategies:

- Clearly define state parks' niche in the spectrum of other resource management providers.
- Design for use a mutually agreed upon process to resolve resource management goal differences when missions differ among resource management providers.
- Develop and maintain strong working relationships with other resource management providers.
- Actively participate in Department area teams.

5. Develop tools to measure the effectiveness of resource management activities in order to determine what works and what does not, as well as continue to develop new tools and techniques.

Strategies:

- Develop a consistent monitoring program.
- Develop a consistent recording protocol.
- Track changes in conditions based on management actions.
- Develop a commitment to documentation.
- Continue to seek out proven best management practices tools.
- Foster research that strategically answers key issues confronting natural resource management in state parks.
- Provide access to and a means of disseminating resource management research results.
- Provide staff with state of the art resource management training.

6. Fully integrate the resource program at all levels of park management.

Strategies:

- Involve all levels of park management in resource work plan development and execution.
- Develop a resource training program for all staff.

Resource management tools:

The Division is working on several resource management tools such as:

- *Using land cover mapping to develop desired future conditions for all state parks*
- *Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP)-related frameworks for prioritizing and evaluating projects and workplans*

Learning new things through research partnerships

The Division issues between 40 and 50 research permits each year to universities and scientists who study elements of the natural and cultural environment in state parks. Some of these permits are issued annually for multi-year research projects.

Information from this research adds to the Division's knowledge of its resource base and helps inform decision-making for resource management and facility development.



Minnesota's state parks contain a wide range of cultural resources:

- Archaeological sites related to American Indians and early European settlement
- Post-settlement historic sites
- WPA and CCC-era park buildings and structures

A comprehensive system-wide inventory of state park lands for cultural resources has not been conducted.

The Division's cultural resource program has an "ahead of the shovel" nature – surveying proposed development sites for cultural resource impacts and conducting site evaluations/data recoveries where impacts from development will occur.

In 2003 and 2004, Division archaeologists conducted between 30 and 40 reconnaissance surveys and several larger-scale site evaluations.

Cultural resource facts and figures:

- 360 archaeological sites
- 62 historic districts
- 620 buildings and structures on the National Register of Historic Places
- 5 National Historic Landmark sites

- Ensure that the resource assessment process is well understood and utilized in order to provide sustainable use of state parks by visitors.

7. Communicate more effectively about the resource program to the public.

Strategies:

- Develop projects cooperatively across programs.
- Present public programs as a team that may include park management, resource specialist and interpretive specialist.
- Develop communication between resource and marketing/media staff.

8. Develop a clear definition of cultural resource program goals and a means of achieving them.

Strategies:

- Review all statutory mandates to ensure compliance and define the pillars upon which the cultural resource program rests.
- Establish goals for the program.
- Establish priorities for reaching the goals.
- Work with DNR Management Resources to determine the feasibility of re-using historic buildings.
- Implement the DNR Conservation Agenda goal of directing 10% of the overall capital maintenance projects for state parks in each biennium to National Register buildings, structures, and districts within state parks and state recreation areas.



Mission: Recreation

Background:

The statutory mandate directs the Division to provide appropriate recreation to “utilize the natural features of the park that can be accommodated without material disturbance of the natural features of the park or the introduction of undue artificiality into the natural scene....” The statute goes further to state that “park use shall be primarily for aesthetic, cultural, and educational purposes, and shall not be designed to accommodate all forms or unlimited volumes of recreational use” (Minnesota Statutes Chapter 86A). Statute also requires that a management plan be prepared for each unit of the state park system.

State parks have maintained a high (95%) visitor satisfaction rate since the first measurement in 1988. However, overnight and day use in state parks has not grown in proportion to the state’s population in the last ten years, remaining relatively flat. Minnesota population trends include: population growth occurring primarily in urban areas, population of the state as a whole growing older, racial and ethnic minority groups growing faster than the rest of the population, and decreasing household size. All of these trends represent growth among groups who tend to participate less in outdoor recreation.

Desired Outcomes:

The Division will maintain the loyalty and satisfaction rates of its current customer base and attract new user groups. Biennial goals to increase use during periods of historically low capacity will be developed. An entrepreneurial approach for selected services will be used. The Division will establish biennial attendance and revenue increases while maintaining the provision of low cost recreation and continue to provide personal service to visitors.

The Division will establish reasonable goals for completing the highest priority management plans. Criteria for adding land or new units to the state park system will be used. A system will be developed for assessing and prioritizing infrastructure needs to support recreation activities, attract new visitors, protect the resources and provide for interpretation.

Goals:

1. **Increase overnight and day use in order to more effectively utilize the existing infrastructure capacity.**

Strategies:

- Strengthen marketing efforts through the evaluation of product, pricing, promotion and placement of state park services and benefits.
- Develop annual marketing plans that include innovative promotions to increase attendance and revenue during low use periods and at lesser-used facilities.
- Conduct social science research such as focus groups and surveys to assess benefits sought by current users and barriers to participation by non-users.
- Assess current recreation and demographic trends to inform decisions surrounding facility and program development.

Recreation facts and figures:

State park system facilities:

- 5,717 campsites
- 223 horse campsites
- 75 group camps
- 35 camper cabins
- 1,255 miles of trail
- 6,526 picnic sites
- 40 beaches
- 33 fishing piers
- 34 visitor centers
- 135 water access sites

State park system visitors:

- Almost 8,245,000 visitors in 2005
- Nearly 935,000 overnight guests in campgrounds, cabins, and lodges

Forest recreation area facilities:

- 997 campsites
- 234 horse campsites
- 11 group camps
- 181 picnic sites
- 35 water access sites

Forest recreation area visitors:

- Almost 142,200 visitors in 2005
- Over 88,000 campers

Top state park activities:

- Hiking
- Sightseeing
- Nature observation

76% of all visitors participate in at least one of these activities.

Camping facts:

- 14% of all state park visitors are campers
- 50% of campers use tents
- 40% of all campers use electric sites

Space available:

Although campgrounds at many state parks are full on summer weekends, some state parks have spaces available during the week and some weekend vacancies as well. Enticing more campers to visit during these low use periods would increase revenue with minimal additional costs.

Satisfied customers:

Minnesota's state parks have had a 95% satisfaction rating or better from its customers since the measure was first recorded in the 1980s. The satisfaction rate is an important indicator in the Department's Conservation Agenda and measures a key part of the Division's mission – providing high quality, rewarding experiences to state park visitors.

Campground hosts:

From May to October, volunteers serve as "live in" hosts at many state park and state forest campgrounds. Their primary responsibility is to assist campers by explaining campground rules and answering questions.

- Develop partnerships and sponsorships to promote the state park system and increase park visitation.

2. Maintain high visitor satisfaction during a time when traditional services are being reduced or service delivery methods are being changed.

Strategies:

- Develop communication plans to create awareness and manage expectations.
- Concentrate service provision in areas that are most important to satisfied customers.
- Decrease administrative load so more time can be spent on visitor services through the use of team management.
- More fully develop campground host program participation and consider a compensation package for campground hosts.

3. Keep visitors safe, reduce conflicts among visitors and keep the natural and cultural resources intact for future generations.

Strategies:

- Review park rules and modify as needed.
- Maintain uniformed security staff visibility in the park.
- Evaluate problem areas and determine the best method to alleviate them.
- Consider cross-training staff for security activities.
- Develop and maintain partnerships with other enforcement providers.
- Utilize interpretive services for visitor management.



4. Evaluate the type and amount of recreation offerings in state parks and recreation areas.

Strategies:

- Determine the recreational niche of each park in the system – each park cannot support every activity.
- Utilize the park management planning process to determine appropriate recreation within each unit.
- Establish a reasonable management plan process and priority system that addresses the highest needs of the system.
- Develop recreation offerings that reflect the participation trends in the state.
- Balance the need to generate revenue with appropriate recreation.
- Evaluate the cost/benefit and appropriateness of providing service upgrades to the current offerings or potential new activities.

5. Minimize impacts of specific user groups on natural and cultural resources in order to meet the Division’s mandate.

Strategies:

- Conduct park management planning to avoid or minimize negative impacts to resources while providing appropriate recreation opportunities.
- Educate visitors through interpretation and marketing.
- Review existing recreation uses and facilities to address emerging or newly identified impacts.

6. Evaluate potential new additions to the state park system, including expansion of existing units or proposals for new units. Evaluations will follow statutory direction to “preserve an accurate representation of Minnesota’s natural and historical heritage . . . provide an adequate supply of scenic, accessible, and usable lands and waters to accommodate the outdoor recreation needs of Minnesota’s citizens” and the DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda goal for a sustainable network of natural lands.

Strategies:

- Evaluate the DNR Strategic Conservation Agenda for areas of mutual interest among Divisions for land acquisition, easements, research, management and protection of public lands to assure that remaining natural ecosystems will be conserved.
- Utilize the Division’s Minnesota State Park Land Study to evaluate the types of experiences and landscapes that are missing for the state park system. (See Appendix B: Figures 4 and 5).
- Utilize the Division’s assessment tool designed for evaluating potential new state park and state recreation area proposals.

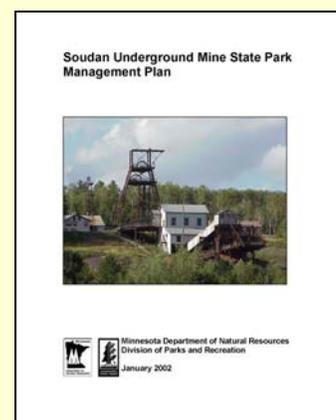
Several trends are important in reviewing recreation needs:

- *What new activities are gaining popularity - what will be the next recreation activity trend?*
- *What activities show declining participation?*
- *How will the changes in age and ethnicity of the state population affect participation in various activities?*
- *What activities do other recreation providers supply? Is this changing over time?*

Management plans:

Management plans for state parks and state recreation areas are required by state statute. Of the 72 units, 33 have plans that are over 20 years old, while five units have no formally adopted plan.

Since 1993, 30 new management plans and plan amendments have been completed, with an additional 8 under development.



Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota:

A citizens group formed in 1954 to support parks and trails in Minnesota, this nonprofit corporation assists the Division, other government agencies, and community organizations to acquire land, build community partnerships and advocate for parks and trails issues. The council also serves as an umbrella organization for state park friends groups.



New development - camper cabins:

These rustic cabins offer another option for visitors, especially older visitors, those without camping equipment, or less experienced visitors not quite ready to "rough it".

The cabins are extremely popular. Some cabins are routinely reserved up to a year in advance, and generate revenue for the Division.

Currently, there are 35 cabins in the state park system. The Division has acquired funding for constructing up to 75 more cabins, some of which will be ready by the end of 2007.

- Develop DNR, legislative, and Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota assessments for individual proposals of new opportunities for DNR regional and Commissioner's Office review.
- Develop criteria for adding lands to existing units and establish a process for developing recommended statutory boundary additions that incorporate DNR regional priorities and Department connections for natural and recreational corridors.
- Continue to identify expansion needs through the park management plan process as stated in the DNR Conservation Agenda.
- Integrate the current evaluation system with other tools to create objective measurements of the benefits and costs of new state park and SRA opportunities, including trail connections and state trail designations.
- Utilize a prioritization system for purchasing inholdings.
- Partner with the Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota on developing and utilizing assessment tools for evaluating new opportunities.
- Partner with other organizations as appropriate to explore connections and creative approaches to preserving important ecosystems and viewsheds.
- Work with the Department to develop a means of meeting the fiduciary responsibility for trust fund lands that are within state park boundaries.
- Work with the Department to further the Conservation Agenda goal of increasing public access to shoreland and public waters.



7. Provide infrastructure improvements or new infrastructure development in order to meet changes in recreation needs, generate revenue, augment visitor's education and understanding of the park or to protect natural and cultural resources and scenic beauty. Develop a means of assessing the cost-benefit ratio of the infrastructure improvements.

Strategies:

- Review market trends to identify emerging trends and potential new facility demands.
- Implement marketing recommendations based on social science research evaluating barriers to participation.
- Determine criteria and placement for high priority facilities.
- Identify critical cultural and natural resource areas to be protected through facility design or engineering solutions.
- Develop criteria to review existing facilities for improvements needed to achieve the goals of utilizing existing capacity.
- Develop a comprehensive long-term bonding formula for addressing building improvements on a regular basis.
- Develop a means of assessing the cost-benefit ratio for infrastructure improvements.

8. Determine how much capital is needed annually to protect the investment of the state park system infrastructure.

Strategies:

- Work with the Department Management Resources Bureau to develop data concerning total value, age, replacement cost and estimated annual maintenance costs of above and below ground infrastructure.
- Prioritize known critical infrastructure maintenance and rehabilitation projects.
- Develop a project prioritization system with associated ranking criteria and review process.
- Review historical bonding levels in relation to infrastructure needs and develop a comprehensive long term bonding proposal for maintaining state park infrastructure.
- Coordinate the development of bonding proposals with the Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota and other partners.
- Develop a system and plan for updating and replacing interpretive displays.
- Locate and inventory utilities and other infrastructure in the geographic information systems to aid repair and replacement prioritizations.

State parks as "small cities":

In many ways, the Division and Department are building and maintaining "small cities" – state parks and other units in the state park system have roads, bridges, buildings and other structures as well as utility networks for providing water, sewer, electricity and communications for its residents, the state park visitor.

An estimated \$10 to \$12 million per biennium is needed for infrastructure rehabilitation, replacement and development for the state park system.

State park system infrastructure:

- 1,600 buildings
- 1,255 miles of trails
- 332 miles of roads
- 72 bridges
- Hundreds of miles of sewer lines, water lines, power lines, and other utilities



An aging workforce:

As with Minnesota's population as a whole, the Division's workforce is getting older.

- *42% of all employees are 50 years and older*
- *61% of all supervisory or management level employees are 50 years and older*
- *To replace these people, the Division will have to recruit, hire and train over 350 people in the next ten years, including nearly 80 at the supervisory/manager level.*

The Division of Parks and Recreation is already experiencing the first wave of retirements among all levels of its staff. These employees represent years of knowledge the Division will try to capture before they leave the organization, as well as valuable experience that can only be replaced over time.

There are, however, several potential positives from which the Division may benefit with the turnover in employees:

- *New energy from individuals as they assume their new roles in the Division.*
- *New ideas and perspectives on achieving the Division's mission.*
- *Ability to create greater diversity among the Division's workforce.*

Human Resources

Background:

The Division of Parks and Recreation employs a highly professional, dedicated group of people that care deeply about the success of the state park system. This is reflected in the consistently high satisfaction rate of park visitors. Within the six-year period of this strategic plan, upwards of one third of the current employees may be eligible for retirement. This represents a significant potential loss of institutional knowledge and raises questions of how the Division attracts, hires and retains employees.

Desired Outcomes:

The Division will work together to successfully navigate the service delivery changes implemented within the state park system. The Division will continue to have a highly professional, motivated group of people to serve state park customers. The Division will have a well-designed system to capture the institutional knowledge of people retiring. The Division will diligently care for the safety, health and wellness of its employees. The Division will develop an exam for promoting current employees as well as hiring new employees.

Goals:

- 1. Retain the institutional knowledge that will be lost through retirements and attrition as well as attract new employees.**

Strategies:

- Develop a process for the transfer of knowledge and expertise that may include oral histories, exit interviews, and reduction in hours to part-time for retiring employees.
- Develop a management training program.
- Reevaluate traditional methods for determining qualified candidates for Division positions.

- 2. Provide for employee safety, health and wellness.**

Strategies:

- Continue the Division's commitment to a strong safety program through training, ongoing communication and provision of safe equipment.
- Explore ideas for continuing to improve upon the Division's safety record.
- Prioritize the most effective means of reducing accidents in order to provide for employee well-being, reduction of lost time and financial liabilities.
- Define the Division's role in providing for "fitness for duty" and overall employee health and wellness.
- Design programs and/or policies to promote employee safety, health and wellness.
- Promote a healthy work and home balance for employees.
- Set clear priorities and work with employees to prioritize workload through annual work planning.
- Create a workplace where employees are appreciated and have a passion for state parks.
- Develop means of supporting employees through current changes in the system.

3. Recruit, train, retain and promote a professional workforce that has appropriate competencies and is representative of the state's population.

Recruitment Strategies:

- Develop an outreach plan for colleges and job fairs.
- Create an outreach program for youth.
- Seek out underemployed groups, i.e. seniors, stay at home parents, other seasonal employees.
- Focus on underrepresented populations.
- Expand student worker and intern programs.
- Expand program or methods for identifying qualified candidates for entry-level positions.

Training Strategies:

- Establish a formal training program.
- Develop a mentoring program for new employees.
- Work with colleges and universities to establish a core state park competency program. Have park staff assist with curriculum development and teaching.
- Provide opportunities for continuous learning.

Retention and Promotion Strategies:

- Provide a means of assisting employees in assessing and achieving career goals that may include more opportunity for mobility assignments.
- Develop means of assessing core competencies and providing employees growth opportunities in deficiency areas.
- Provide a career ladder.

4. Be proactive in responding to the Division's changing management structure including the team management of parks and seasonal park operations.

Strategies:

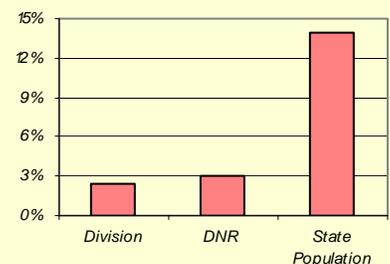
- Develop a plan for recruitment, training, retention and promotion once the new system has been fully constructed.
- Conduct a reclassification study based on changes to the system.

A more diverse workforce:

Minnesota's population is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. Racial and ethnic minorities are underrepresented among the Department and the Division's workforce.

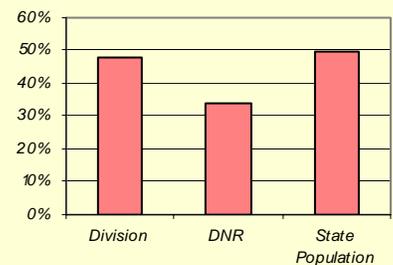
Minorities as a percent of the workforce and state population

<i>Division</i>	<i>2.5%</i>
<i>DNR</i>	<i>3.0%</i>
<i>State Population</i>	<i>14.0%</i>



Women as a percent of the workforce and state population

<i>Division</i>	<i>48.2%</i>
<i>DNR</i>	<i>34.0%</i>
<i>State Population</i>	<i>50.4%</i>



The Division will seek to develop a workforce that reflects the state's population. Doing so will provide opportunities for people from underrepresented groups to enter the natural resources and recreation management fields.

A more diverse workforce will also increase the Division's ability to connect with these same minority groups which are underrepresented as visitors to state parks.

What are forest recreation areas?

The Division assumed management responsibility of 46 state forest campgrounds and day use areas from the DNR Division of Forestry in 2002. (See Mission: Recreation section for further description).

The Division received a budget increase to manage these sites. However, operating the sites at state park standards costs three times the amount of the budget increase. Further, revenue collected at the sites is returned to the state general fund, rather than being retained by the Division to offset the operational costs of the sites.

The Division has worked over the last several budget cycles to integrate the sites into the overall Division budget, and strike a balance between operational costs and standards at sites in comparison to the rest of the state park system.



Administration

Background:

The Division of Parks and Recreation is recognized as having one of the most sophisticated budgeting tools in the nation through the use of standards. The Division has also been an innovative leader by centralizing and privatizing the camping reservation system; statutorily dedicating the profits from the working capital account to resource management and interpretive activities; developing a marketing program; developing the Passport Club; and accepting credit cards for payment (the last three were cited in "Re-inventing Government, How the Entrepreneurial Spirit is Transforming the Public Sector," 1992). The Division will continue this legacy of innovation.

To provide the highest priority visitor services while creating efficiencies, the Division will review and implement as necessary, changes in six major service delivery areas: Forest Recreation Areas (FRA's); Team Management of Parks; Seasonal Parks; Privatized Reservation System; Hours of Contact Station Operation; and Automated Self-pay Systems. Additionally, the Division will target specific programs for efficiency and effectiveness evaluations.

Desired Outcomes:

The Division will pursue innovative means of service delivery that create efficiencies while maintaining the historically high satisfaction rates. Examples include: developing low cost means of providing services in FRA's, reducing duplication of administrative services through team management of state parks, basing staffing and service availability on visitor use patterns, providing site-specific campground reservations through a centralized reservation system, and piloting and evaluating self-registration technology to be considered for wider implementation. The purpose of these changes is to deploy staff to the highest priority activities.

A methodology will be developed for reviewing Division programs, with review determinations conducted on a biennial basis. A prioritized budgeting and staffing system will be developed for use in times of reduction or expansion. Augmenting the budget through the use of increased partnerships and volunteerism will be explored.

Goals:

- 1. Adjust service delivery to best spend the available funding and respond to the mandate of reforming government while maintaining high customer satisfaction.** (The first strategy is being reviewed and recommendations for implementation made concurrent with the development of the strategic plan).

Strategies:

- Implement, monitor changes, document savings and evaluate visitor response in six targeted service delivery areas:

- Forest Recreation Areas (FRA's). The FRA's are being evaluated to determine the level of service that should be provided in each, based on use patterns. Alternate means of providing services are being explored.
 - Team Management of Parks. Currently five parks are cooperatively managed in order to reduce duplication of administrative services. Additional parks are being evaluated for team management. Implementation of this and seasonal parks will take place as much as possible through retirements and attrition and will be fully implemented by the beginning of the 2008 fiscal year.
 - Seasonal Parks. Parks with lower day and overnight use are being evaluated to determine which parks may have reduced or no services during low use periods. Some parks may be involved in team management as well as being designated as seasonal parks.
 - Site-specific reservation system. A system was implemented during the 2005 camping season that allows visitors to select their own campsite when making a reservation. The full payment for camping is also collected at the time the reservation is made.
 - Contact station staffing. Hours of operation and staffing for contact stations will be adjusted according to historic visitor use patterns, rather than the current practice of consistent hours throughout the park system.
 - Automated self-pay systems and increased self-registration. Investigate methods to reduce costs via greater user self-service.
 - Evaluate costs for other methods of delivering services.
 - Evaluate the reduction or elimination of high cost labor-intensive activities.
 - Foster an environment of innovation.
- 2. Review Division programs as appropriate for efficiency and effectiveness.**
- Strategies:*
- Determine if and what changes need to be made in programs to support the changes in service delivery.
 - Determine which Division programs will be evaluated on a biennial basis.
 - Develop a methodology for conducting program reviews and evaluations.
 - Implement changes from evaluations as appropriate.
- 3. Ensure that the budget distribution is a reflection of the Division's mission in times of contraction as well as times of budget expansion.**

What is team management?

A state park is designated as a lead park that manages another unit or units for the state park system. Managed units can include another state park or state recreation area, a state wayside, or a forest recreation area. The intent is to consolidate administrative and supervisory tasks, reducing those costs and placing more staff hours into the field for resource management and visitor service tasks.

Why provide site-specific reservations for campsites and lodging?

- *Customer service - visitors requested it for many years.*
- *Efficiency – it results in less administrative work assigning sites and handling money at the state park.*
- *Safety – less money is handled at the state park as payment is made in full at the time of reservation.*

Providing services via technology - customer service improvements:

- *Site-specific reservations.*
- *Park maps, management plans and other documents available online.*
- *Web-based reservations – first available in 2002, now account for over ½ of all reservations.*

	Telephone	Web
2001	100%	----
2002	66%	34%
2003	59%	41%
2004	60%	40%
2005	46%	54%

Partnership examples:

The Division has entered into partnerships with several organizations to further the Division's mission. Examples include:

- *Touchstone Energy – sponsors GreenTouch Day, an annual volunteer cleanup event organized at state parks throughout the system, and provides funds for publications and printing..*
- *Recreation Equipment Inc. (REI) – sale of annual permits and availability of promotional materials at REI store locations.*

Other funding possibilities:

During the last several years, various proposals have been debated at the Minnesota State Legislature for dedicating a portion of the state sales tax to fund natural resource programs. Many of these proposals included funding for state parks.

A dedicated account would provide a more stable funding stream for the state parks and other resource programs throughout Minnesota.

Strategies:

- Develop mission driven priorities for budgeting purposes.
- Create a funding matrix that reduces or adds to the current budget with mission-based priorities that include all levels of the organization and Forest Recreation Areas.

4. Mitigate the impacts of general fund reductions.

Strategies:

- Create new revenue opportunities.
- Create new sources of funding.
- Explore corporate sponsorships.
- Explore corporate partnerships.
- Evaluate expansion of the volunteer program.
- Work toward establishing a sustainable dedicated account.



Implementation - A Road Map to Achieve Strategic Goals

Direction Setting:

Minnesota Statutes Chapter 86A established the overall mandates for the units of the state park system. The Department's [A Strategic Conservation Agenda](#), the [2003-2008 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan](#), and this strategic plan set the overarching direction for the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation through 2011. There is much to be accomplished during the plan's six-year timeframe.

The strategic plan represents the first six years of work to address the long-range trends and strategic goals identified during the planning process. As it implements the plan, the Division will continue to evaluate and adjust to changing organizational, social, and political environments.

Biennial Workplans – Actions and Measurable Outcomes:

The Division will implement the broad-based goals set out by the Department's [A Strategic Conservation Agenda](#) and this strategic plan through a series of three two-year workplans. The two-year workplans will cover fiscal years 2007-08, 2009-2010, and 2011-2012. To develop the workplans, the Division prioritized the goals and strategies within the strategic plan, identifying which strategies should be addressed first and what strategies could be pursued in tandem to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the Division's efforts. A copy of the first two-year workplan is included at the front of this document.

Each workplan will address selected goals and strategies with identified actions, measurable outcomes, and timeframes for completion. Regular check-in points will be established for continuous measurement of progress and success. The first two-year workplan was developed in conjunction with the completion of the strategic plan.

The three two-year work plans will link the goals of the strategic plan with the Division's biennial budget planning and other legislative proposals, as well as the park unit resource workplans and annual workplans.



For more information:

Additional information about the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation and the Division's strategic plan is available at the DNR website:

www.mndnr.gov/parks

The strategic plan is available to view or download, otherwise contact the Division of Parks and Recreation to request a copy:

*DNR Division of Parks & Recreation
500 Lafayette Road, Box 39
St. Paul, MN 55155*

The DNR website also includes links to other Department and Division studies and reports cited in this document, including the Department's [A Strategic Conservation Agenda](#) and the [2003-2008 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan](#).

As part of the stakeholder involvement process for the strategic plan, park managers were asked to present the draft core area goals and strategies to their park's friends group to help the Division gather information that would help in completing the plan and the three subsequent two-year workplans.

Those parks without active friends groups were encouraged to use another group they participated with or that was familiar with the park from whom they could solicit comments about the draft plan. Other park managers that did not have an active friends group or alternative group solicited individual comments from active park users and individuals within their communities that are interested in the state park.

Presentations to these groups were made between June and September 2005. Comments were received from managers at 19 state parks. The draft core area goals and strategies were also presented to the Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota.

Appendix A: Stakeholder Involvement Summary

State Park Friends Groups and Other Comments

The resulting comments were uneven, with many comments specific to individual park issues and needs. Other comments were more broadly focused and more related to the strategic planning effort.

General Statements and Observations

Several comments said directly and the tone of many others was that state parks are not broken – people are generally happy with the state park system, its programs and what it offers. In that way, many comments were supportive of the strategic plan because much of it is a continuation of what the Division has been doing.

The most often mentioned concern is an issue of perceived fairness – that the smaller/less busy parks are losing out in development, operations, and staffing support to the larger/busier parks. Commentors note that smaller/less busy parks tend to be located in areas with fewer recreation alternatives for local citizens. Several comments suggested cutting services at larger parks would draw more attention to budget problems than reducing services at small parks.

Concerns expressed in the comments clustered around strategies or current operational decisions that have brought or could bring change – curtailed interpretive programming, team/satellite management, reduced staffing at some parks, corporate partnerships, etc.

The two core areas receiving the most comments and interest were **Interpretation** and **Recreation**. The comments illustrate strong support for doing more in these areas – offering more interpretive opportunities (guided and self-guided) and providing improved and additional recreational facilities.

Finding additional funding, not cutting services, was the consensus across the comments for addressing budget issues. A wide range of funding sources were identified – more general fund support, entrance fees, program or event fees, donations, corporate partnerships, grants, etc. However, there was no consensus among which sources were the most appropriate.

The comments did not identify new strategies in addition to the 30 strategies already identified. However, there were multiple comments for new action steps for some of the strategies in addition to those already outlined in the draft core area goals and strategies.

Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota Comments

The draft core area goals and strategies were presented to the Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota board of directors in July 2005. The council's comment letter is included on the following pages.



September 7, 2005

Courtland Nelson, Director
Division of Parks and Recreation
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
500 Lafayette Road
St. Paul, MN 55155-4039

Dear Courtland,

I am writing to convey comments from the Parks & Trails Council of Minnesota on the Minnesota State Parks Six Year Strategic Plan working draft. Our comments relate to the vision, related funding issues and partnership opportunities. In general we are pleased with the apparent high level of commitment to the three program areas

First, it is unclear what the state park vision for the future might be and what your overall strategy is to achieve that vision. The plan's guiding principles mention "highest priorities for the division" and the DNR's "Conservation Agenda." But it does not discuss the key concepts of the department's agenda that you intend to address nor does it say what the highest priorities are in any comprehensive statement.

You have spoken to our group about your vision to stabilize the organization at a new funding base and then move forward with new initiatives. Managing a crisis and achieving stability is vital, yet, the plan contains no overall strategic vision to outline a preferred future condition different than the current level of budget and services. We view the current level of budget and services as significantly below the preferred. We feel the plan doesn't adequately describe the base from which you are starting and the place you want to be in six years and beyond. The silence implies a management strategy that is comfortable with this trend line, a trend line we at Parks & Trails do not support.

Specifically, a section that provides an overview of your last strategic plan would be useful; where you were at the beginning and end, what the division has done to address reduced funding, and how this has impacted the mission. We think this will provide needed context for your "commitment to mission" and your vision for the future.

As you know, the Parks & Trails Council is aware of the division's funding history. Putting it in the plan would establish a context for all readers. We also

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noted that the plan calls for establishing a figure for full funding of resource management including cultural resources but not interpretation and recreation. We think that the plan should also call for a process that establishes benchmarks for all three parts of the state park mission including full funding of recreation and interpretation/education. We know these processes and numbers exist. They should be included in this document.

Parks & Trails also feels that there are many opportunities to utilize the friends groups as volunteers and strategic partners that are not recognized in the plan. Some friends groups already provide park programs and education, most do some sort of service projects related to maintenance or resource management and all work hard to involve the local communities. We think the plan should acknowledge this diversity of effort and outline a goal and strategy to support friends groups efforts and partnerships locally, regionally and statewide. The Parks & Trails Council will continue working to build friends group capacity and numbers statewide.

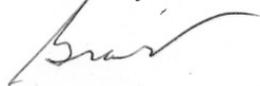
Third, while we do not feel it is our place to make specific comments about staffing decisions, we do want to convey our concerns about staff reductions and changes that have been made recently. We are concerned the reductions have reduced the division's ability to manage the resources and to provide personal, high quality customer service and education through direct interaction with park users. We are also concerned that the changes have adversely impacted the division's career ladder. These changes could lead to significant problems for the management of our state parks in the future.

Finally, Parks & Trails is ready to be a partner in implementing the Six Year Strategic Plan. We can contribute in more areas than the land acquisition planning and capital budget areas mentioned. We would like to work toward achieving operation and maintenance standards that maintain or increase your current high visitor satisfaction levels and would like to be a partner in expanding your base of users and supporters. We are already doing so with the MN Trails magazine and believe much more is possible.

We strongly support the commitment the plan conveys to the three program areas and to visitor services. We believe it would be to the division's advantage to more thoroughly explore within this plan the many opportunities you have for strategic and tactical partnerships with the Parks & Trails Council, state park friends groups and other private organizations and businesses.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.

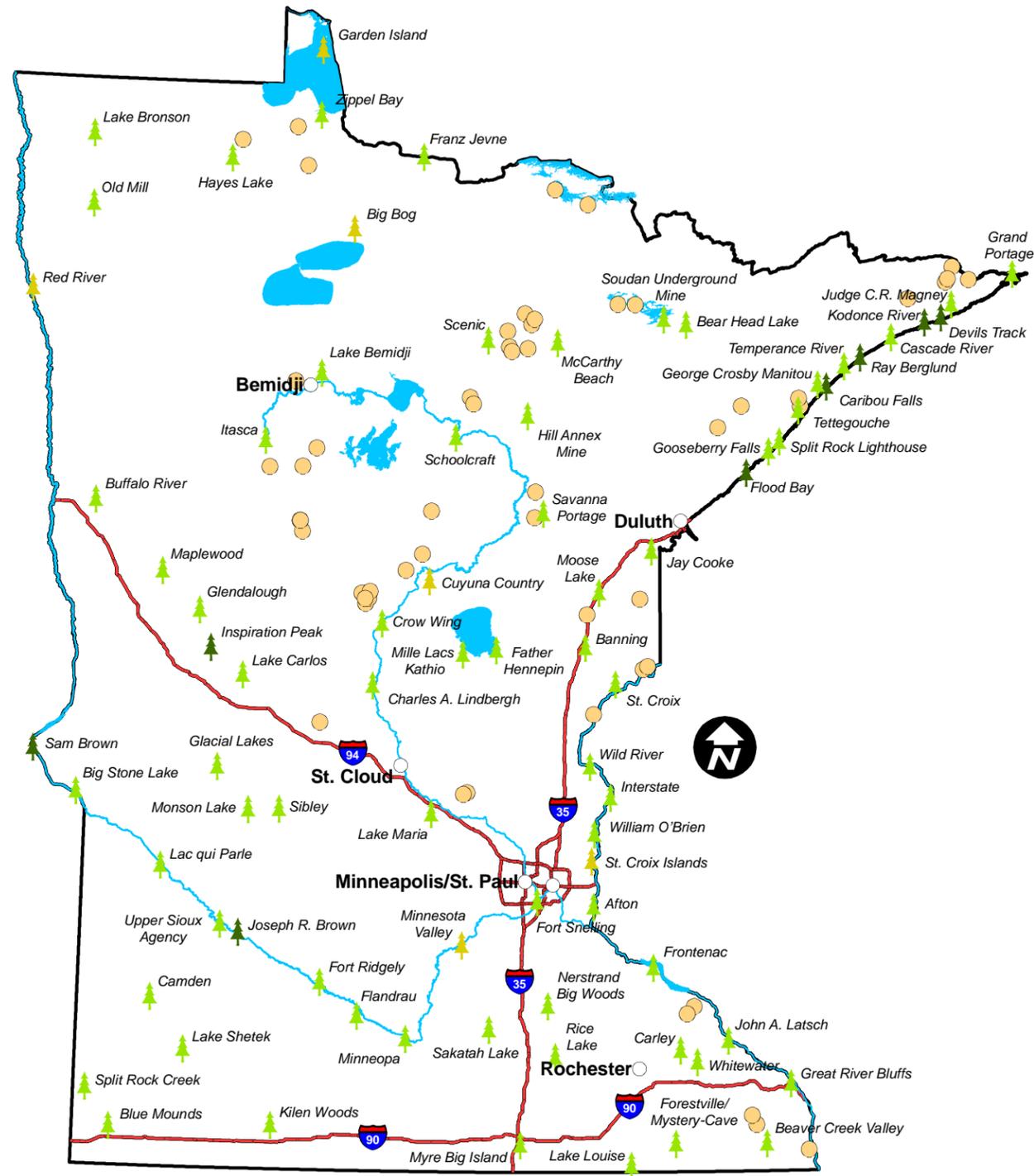
Sincerely,



Grant J. Merritt
President



Figure 1 - Units Managed by the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation



State Parks – 66 units

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Afton | Gooseberry Falls | Monson Lake |
| Banning | Grand Portage | Moose Lake |
| Bear Head Lake | Great River Bluffs | Myre-Big Island |
| Beaver Creek Valley | Hayes Lake | Nerstrand Big Woods |
| Big Stone Lake | Hill Annex Mine | Old Mill |
| Blue Mounds | Interstate | Rice Lake |
| Buffalo River | Itasca | St. Croix |
| Camden | Jay Cooke | Sakatah Lake |
| Carley | John A. Latsch | Savanna Portage |
| Cascade River | Judge C.R. Magney | Scenic |
| Charles A. Lindbergh | Kiln Woods | Schoolcraft |
| Crow Wing | Lac qui Parle | Sibley |
| Father Hennepin | Lake Bemidji | Soudan Underground Mine |
| Flandrau | Lake Bronson | Split Rock Creek |
| Forestville/Mystery Cave | Lake Carlos | Split Rock Lighthouse |
| Fort Ridgely | Lake Louise | Temperance River |
| Fort Snelling | Lake Maria | Tettegouche |
| Franz Jevne | Lake Shetek | Upper Sioux Agency |
| Frontenac | McCarthy Beach | Whitewater |
| George Crosby Manitou | Maplewood | Wild River |
| Glacial Lakes | Mille Lacs Kathio | William O'Brien |
| Glendalough | Minneopa | Zippel Bay |

State Recreation Areas – 6 Units

- Big Bog
- Cuyuna Country
- Garden Island
- Minnesota Valley
- Red River
- St. Croix Islands

State Waysides – 8 units

- Caribou Falls
- Devils Track
- Flood Bay
- Inspiration Peak
- Joseph R. Brown
- Kodonce River
- Ray Berglund
- Sam Brown

Forest Recreation Areas – 46 units

Minnesota's State Park System:

The DNR Division of Parks and Recreation manages three types of units described in statute as part the state park system.

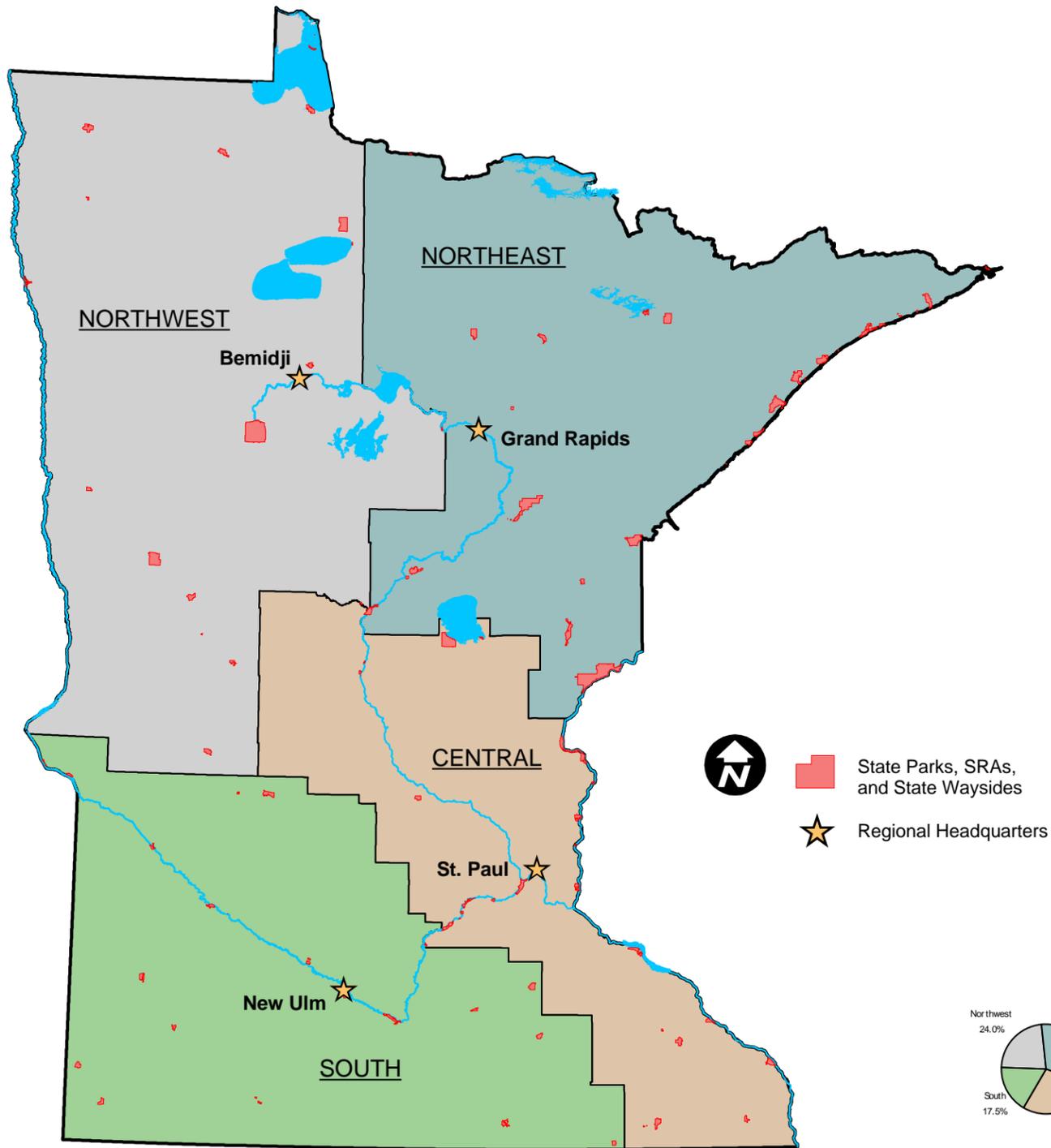
State Parks -
 "A state park shall be established to protect and perpetuate extensive areas of the state possessing those resources which illustrate and exemplify Minnesota's natural phenomena and to provide for the use, enjoyment, and understanding of such resources without impairment for the enjoyment and recreation of future generations."
 MS s86A.05 subd.2

State Recreation Areas -
 "A state recreation area shall be established to provide a broad selection of outdoor recreation opportunities in a natural setting which may be used by large numbers of people."
 MS s86A.05 subd.3

State Waysides -
 State Waysides are small units often encompassing an important scenic or cultural site. Because of their small size, state waysides typically support more limited recreation opportunities than state parks or state recreation areas.

The Division also manages a fourth type of facility: forest recreation areas. Originally developed and managed by the DNR Division of Forestry, forest recreation areas are located within state forests. These areas consist of four main types: campgrounds, horse camps, remote campsites, and day use areas. Many of the areas are located on lakes or other waters and provide boating access, swimming or other water-based recreation.

Figure 2 - DNR Division of Parks and Recreation Organization

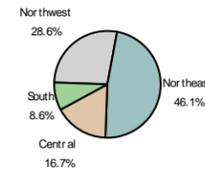


Number of Units in Each Region

	State Parks	SRAs	Waysides	FRA's
Northwest	12	3	1	8
Northeast	20	1	5	37
Central	17	2	0	8
South	17	0	2	0

Acres Administered by the Division in Each Region*

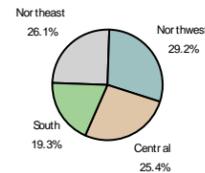
	Acres	Percent
Northwest	64,524.8	28.6%
Northeast	104,103.6	46.1%
Central	37,716.5	16.7%
South	19,426.3	8.6%



* Includes trust fund property within state park, SRA and wayside statutory boundaries, but does not include FRA's.

Division Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Positions in Each Region*

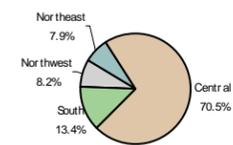
	FTEs	Percent
Northwest	108	26.1%
Northeast	121	29.2%
Central	105	25.4%
South	80	19.3%



* Does not include 21 FTEs in the Division central office.

Minnesota Residents within Each Region*

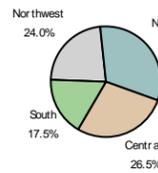
	Residents	Percent
Northwest	426,730	8.2%
Northeast	411,676	7.9%
Central	3,666,995	70.5%
South	699,690	13.4%



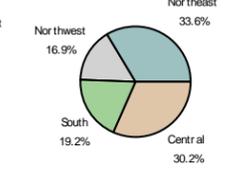
* MN State Demographers Office 2005 population estimate.

Overnight and Total Visitation in Each Region*

	Overnight	Percent	Total Visits	Percent
Northwest	245,068	24.0%	1,425,755	16.9%
Northeast	327,716	32.0%	2,831,396	33.6%
Central	271,087	26.5%	2,542,725	30.2%
South	179,103	17.5%	1,619,953	19.2%



Overnight



Total

* Includes State Park, SRA, and FRA visits

Administrative Regions:

The Department of Natural Resources and its associated Divisions divide the state into four administrative regions. Each region has a regional headquarters. The Department (and Division) Central Office is located in St. Paul.

In the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation, regional managers and regional staff oversee the operation of park units within their region, as well as the resource and interpretive programs for those units.

The Division's central office includes the Division Director, Deputy Director, and other Division-wide management staff. Statewide functions including Real Estate and Development, Planning, IT, Marketing, and the Business Office are located in the Central Office. The statewide park operations, resource and interpretive programs are also coordinated from the Central Office.

The Division has 195 full-time employees and 700 part-time employees. Approximately 85% of the Division's staff resources are assigned to the field (at park units), with 8.5% in regional offices and 6.5% in the Central Office.

Division Staff Distribution (2005)

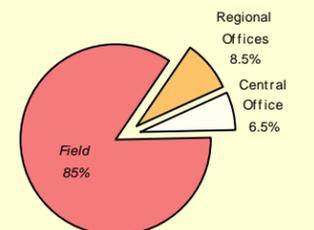
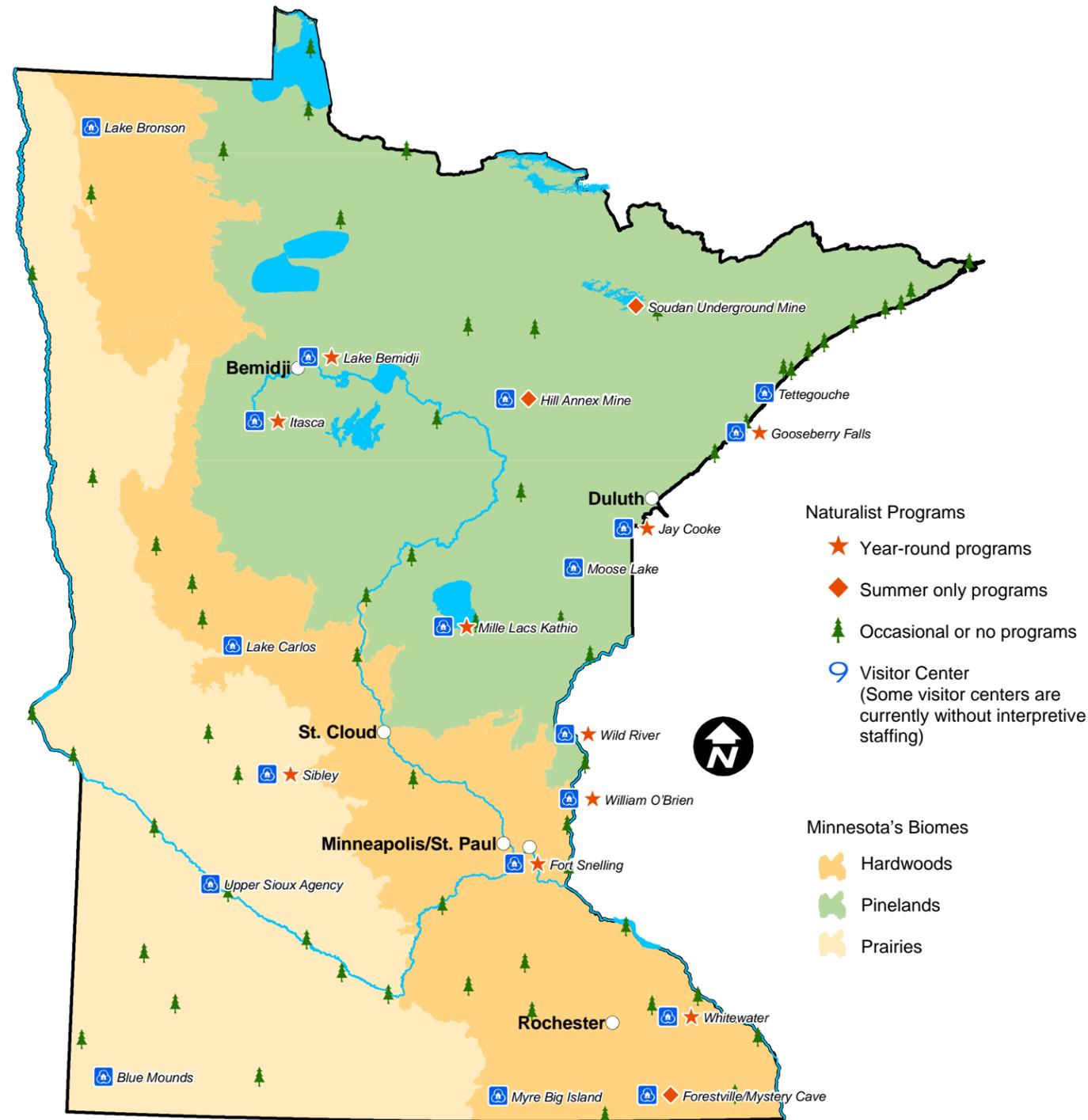


Figure 3 – Interpretive Services in Minnesota’s State Parks



- Naturalist Programs**
- ★ Year-round programs
 - ◆ Summer only programs
 - 🌲 Occasional or no programs
 - 👤 Visitor Center (Some visitor centers are currently without interpretive staffing)

- Minnesota’s Biomes**
- 🌳 Hardwoods
 - 🌲 Pinelands
 - 🌾 Prairies

Overview of Interpretive Services

The Division of Parks and Recreation provides learning opportunities for visitors, focused on the natural and cultural resources found in state parks. In 2005:

- Almost 1.1 million visitors benefited from the interpretive exhibits found in state park visitor centers.
- Nearly 100,000 visitors participated directly in scheduled, naturalist-guided presentations.
- An estimated additional 500,000 visitors enhanced their park experience through self-guided learning opportunities such as interpretive trails, kiosks, brochures, and other materials.

Guided and Self-Guided Experiences

State park interpretive and outdoor education opportunities are presented in a variety of ways:

- Guided experiences - naturalist-led talks, hikes, and evening campfire programs.
- Self-guided experiences - interpretive trails, brochures, audio-visual programs, exhibits and other displays.

Ten state parks offer year-round naturalist-led programming, while an additional 3 parks offer naturalist-led programming during the summer. The remaining parks throughout the system offer only occasional or no guided interpretive experiences. Seven of the 19 visitor centers in the state park system are open to visitors only occasionally because of the lack of interpretive staff.

New Strategies for Interpretive Services

The Division of Parks and Recreation is pursuing several strategies to increase interpretive opportunities for park visitors, including:

- Increase conservation education programming about clean waters, wetlands, land stewardship and managing natural and cultural resources for future generations. Focus will be to engage youth in Department programs and activities.
- Use technology to deliver interpretive messages – possible methods include interactive kiosks, interpretive program podcasts, and posting interpretive information for viewing and downloading via the state park website.

Interpretive Services:

An important part of the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation’s statutory mission is to educate the public about the natural and cultural resources found in each state park.

The mission of the Division’s Interpretive Program is:

“To provide accessible interpretive services which create a sense of stewardship for Minnesota’s natural and cultural heritage by illuminating the changing relationships between people and landscapes over time.”

The Division adopted an Interpretive Services Plan to help guide the development of interpretive resources and allocation of staff throughout the park system. Each unit of the park system has a unique role in providing interpretation and education based on the natural and cultural resources it encompasses. The Interpretive Services Plan evaluated each unit based on its resources and on the audiences it attracts (number of visitors overall, overnight visitors, school groups) to determine the interpretive effort appropriate for that unit.

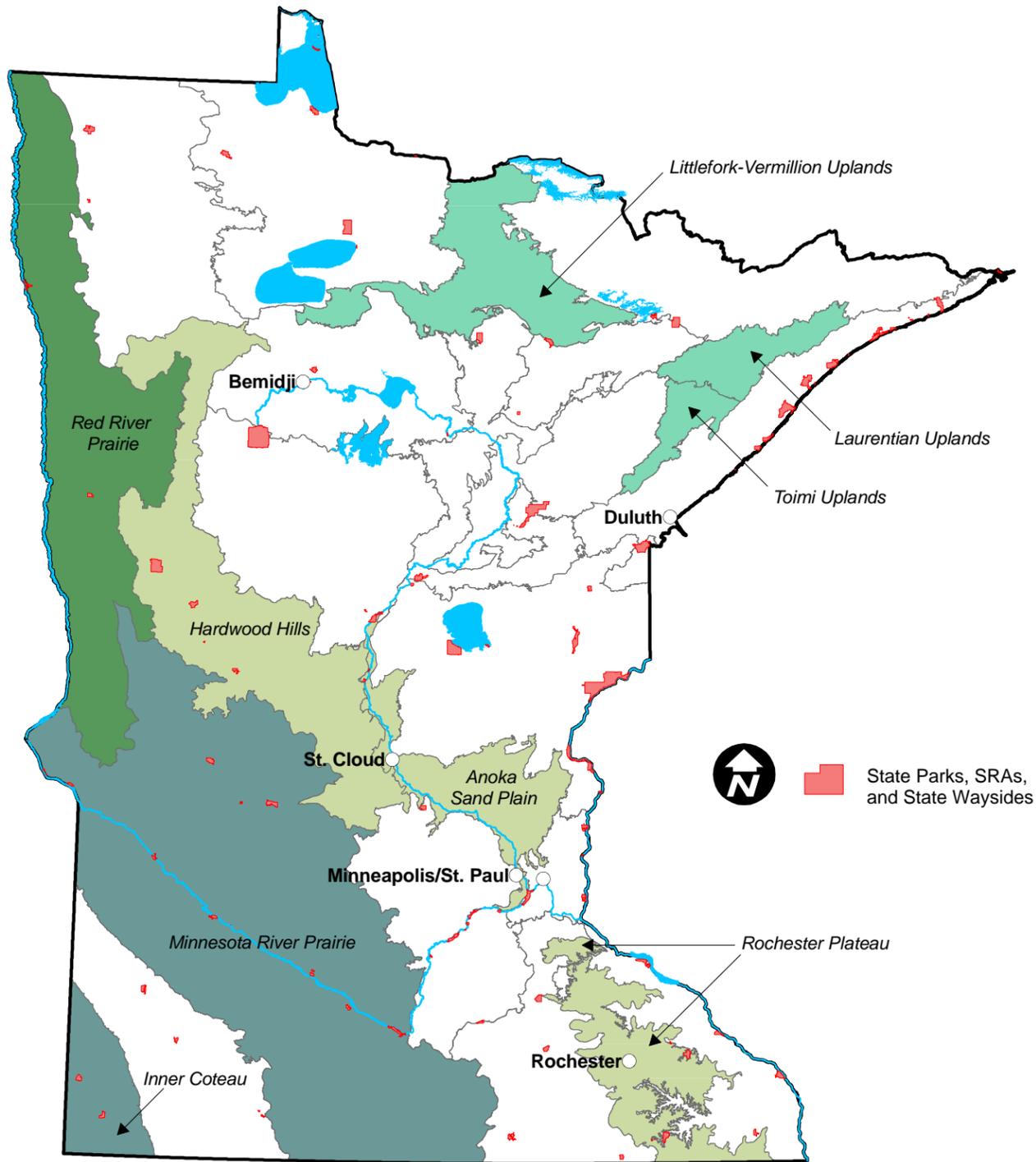
The Division’s interpretive program also plays an important role in communicating Department messages to the public. State parks provide a venue and audience for disseminating information about the Department’s efforts in many areas such as game and fish rules, forest management practices, and other programs or initiatives.

L.C. Merriam, an early state park advocate, summed up the value of educational efforts in state parks as such:

“State parks connect us, as by a hand touch, with all the centuries they have known.”

Source: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Recreation. 1995. Minnesota State Park System Interpretive Services Plan.

Figure 4 - Resource Preservation Needs for Minnesota's Landscape Regions



ECS Subsections with Greatest Biological Resource Preservation Needs

Seven biological themes were identified as high or medium need for representation in over twelve subsections.

The three ECS subsections with the greatest number of unrepresented themes are:

- Hardwood Hills
- Anoka Sand Plain
- Rochester Plateau

ECS Subsections with Greatest Geological Resource Preservation Needs

Two geologic themes are identified to have high or medium need for representation in the state park system in six subsections.

The two ECS subsections with the greatest number of unrepresented themes are:

- Inner Coteau
- Minnesota River Prairie

ECS Subsections with Greatest Cultural Resource Preservation Needs

There is limited data available for preservation and interpretation of many types of cultural features. Information on standing structures is robust, because the structures are readily observable. Information on subsurface archaeological sites is more limited since they are only documented when they are disturbed for research, construction or land use activities.

The ECS Subsection with the greatest number of unrepresented themes is:

- Red River Prairie

ECS Subsections without State Park System Units

Subsections without state park system units have unrepresented themes across several of the above categories.

The three ECS Subsection without state park system units are:

- Littlefork-Vermillion Uplands
- Laurentian Uplands
- Toimi Uplands

Minnesota's Landscape Regions:

Part of the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation's statutory mission is to preserve examples of Minnesota's native landscapes. State parks are to "exemplify the natural characteristics of the major landscape regions of the state, as shown by accepted classifications . . ." MS s86A.05 subd 2.

The DNR and U.S. Forest Service developed an Ecological Classification System (ECS) for ecological mapping and landscape classification in Minnesota.

ECS Subsections are defined using glacial deposition processes, surface bedrock formations, topographic relief, and distribution of plants, especially trees. Minnesota has 26 subsections.

The Division analyzed these subsections as part of its *Minnesota State Park System Land Study*. The gap analysis followed 5 steps:

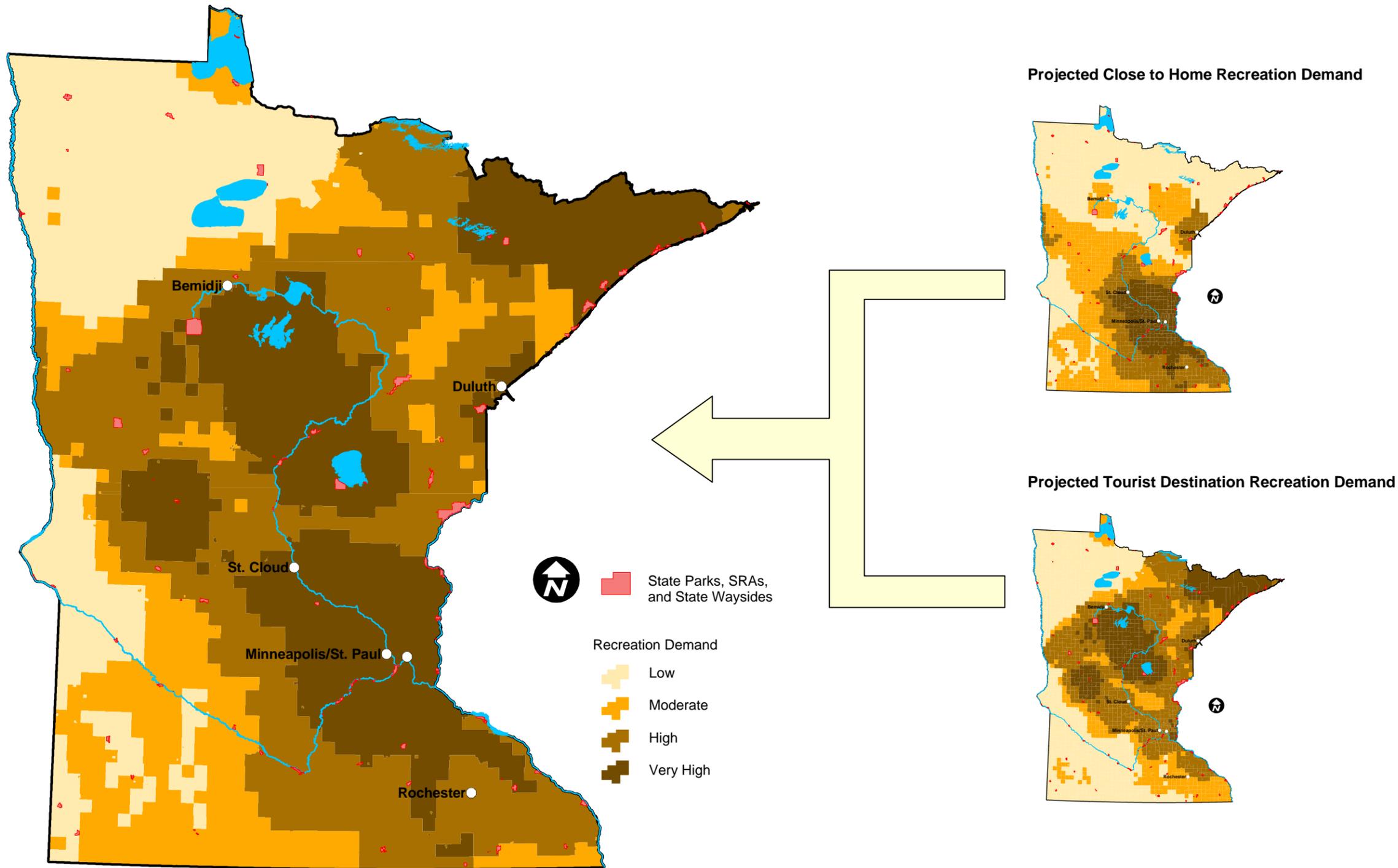
1. Define biological, geological and cultural resource themes across the state.
2. Identify how well each theme is represented within the state park system.
3. Identify which themes are present in each subsection.
4. Determine the significance of themes within each subsection.
5. Identify which significant themes are not preserved in the state park system.

Subsections with large numbers of unrepresented themes in one or more of the resource categories were identified as resource preservation need areas.

Subsections without a unit of the state park system were also identified as areas with resource preservation needs.

Source: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Recreation. 2000. *Minnesota State Park System Land Study*.

Figure 5 - Projected Outdoor Recreation Demand for 2025



Projecting Recreation Demand:
 A part of the DNR Division of Parks and Recreation's statutory mission is to provide recreation opportunities, without impairment to its resource base.

The Division developed a projection for recreation demand in 2025 as part of its Minnesota State Park System Land Study. The projection used population and tourism destination forecasts to estimate the geographic distribution of recreation demand for 2025.

Two components were used to develop the projection:

1. Close to home demand – representing the number of people that live within 30 miles of any particular location. This component is meant to capture primarily day users, or local demand for recreation by people near their homes.
2. Tourism destination demand – representing the number of recreation hours spent within 30 miles of major tourism destinations. This component is meant to capture demand for recreation facilities from people on vacation within 30 miles of their primary destination.

A composite of two components serves as a projection of the demand for outdoor recreation in Minnesota for 2025.

The Minnesota Office of Tourism identifies the tourism destination locations annually.

Source: Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks and Recreation. 2000. Minnesota State Park System Land Study.

Appendix C: Sources Used in Development of the Strategic Plan

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Appendix D: Authorizing Legislation for Minnesota's State Park System

Included in this appendix are those portions of Minnesota Statutes Chapter 85 and 86a that relate to the overall mission and general guidance for the Minnesota state park system.

These portions are the most directly relevant to the Division's strategic plan efforts. Additional portions of the chapters contain further details concerning the establishment, planning, development, and operation of the various units of the system.

The chapters in their entirety are available via the Minnesota State Legislature website:

www.leg.state.mn.us/leg/statutes.asp.

Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 85

85.011 Confirmation of creation and establishment of state parks, monuments, recreation reserves and waysides.

The legislature of this state has provided for the creation and establishment of state parks, designated monuments, recreation reserves and waysides for the purpose of conserving the scenery, natural and historic objects and wildlife and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.

The establishment of such state parks, designated monuments, recreation reserves and waysides is hereby confirmed as provided in this section and sections [85.012](#) and [85.013](#) and they shall remain perpetually dedicated for the use of the people of the state for park purposes.

The enumerated state parks, state monuments, state recreation areas, and state waysides shall consist of the lands and other property authorized therefor before January 1, 1969, together with such other lands and properties as may be authorized therefor on or after January 1, 1969.

HIST: 1969 c 524 s 1

Minnesota Statutes, Chapter 86A

86A.04 Composition of system.

The outdoor recreation system shall consist of all state parks; state recreation areas; state trails established pursuant to sections [84.029](#), subdivision 2, [85.015](#), [85.0155](#), and [85.0156](#); state scientific and natural areas; state wilderness areas; state forests; state wildlife management areas; state water access sites, which include all lands and facilities established by the commissioner of natural resources or the commissioner of transportation to provide public access to water; state wild, scenic, and recreational rivers; state historic sites; state rest areas, which include all facilities established by the commissioner of transportation for the safety, rest, comfort and use of the highway traveler, and shall include all existing facilities designated as rest areas and waysides by the commissioner of transportation; and any other units not listed in this section that are classified under section [86A.05](#). Each individual state park, state recreation area, and so forth is called a "unit."

HIST: 1975 c 353 s 4; 1976 c 166 s 7; 1993 c 172 s 38; 2000 c 495 s 6; 1Sp2003 c 13 s 4

86A.05 Classification and purposes.

Subdivision 1. **Classification.** The outdoor recreation system shall be comprised of units classified as follows, and each unit shall be authorized, established, and administered to accomplish the purpose and objectives of its classification.

Subd. 2. **State park; purpose; resource and site qualifications; administration.** (a) A state park shall be established to protect and perpetuate extensive areas of the state possessing those resources which illustrate and exemplify Minnesota's natural phenomena and to provide for the use, enjoyment, and understanding of such resources without impairment for the enjoyment and recreation of future generations.

(b) No unit shall be authorized as a state park unless its proposed location substantially satisfies the following criteria:

(1) Exemplifies the natural characteristics of the major landscape regions of the state, as shown by accepted classifications, in an essentially unspoiled or restored condition or in a condition that will permit restoration in the foreseeable future; or contains essentially unspoiled natural resources of sufficient extent and importance to meaningfully contribute to the broad illustration of the state's natural phenomena; and

(2) Contains natural resources, sufficiently diverse and interesting to attract people from throughout the state; and

(3) Is sufficiently large to permit protection of the plant and animal life and other natural resources which give the park its qualities and provide for a broad range of opportunities for human enjoyment of these qualities.

(c) State parks shall be administered by the commissioner of natural resources in a manner which is consistent with the purposes of this subdivision to preserve, perpetuate, and interpret natural features that existed in the area of the park prior to settlement and other significant natural, scenic, scientific, or historic features that are present. Management shall seek to maintain a balance among the plant and animal life of the park and to reestablish desirable plants and animals that were formerly indigenous to the park area but are now missing. Programs to interpret the natural features of the park shall be provided. Outdoor recreation activities to utilize the natural features of the park that can be accommodated without material disturbance of the natural features of the park or the introduction of undue artificiality into the natural scene may be permitted. Park use shall be primarily for aesthetic, cultural, and educational purposes, and shall not be designed to accommodate all forms or unlimited volumes of recreational use. Physical development shall be limited to those facilities necessary to complement the natural features and the values being preserved.

Subd. 3. **State recreation area; purpose; resource and site qualifications; administration.** (a) A state recreation area shall be established to provide a broad selection of outdoor recreation opportunities in a natural setting which may be used by large numbers of people.

(b) No unit shall be authorized as a state recreation area unless its proposed location substantially satisfies the following criteria:

(1) Contains natural or artificial resources which provide outstanding outdoor recreational opportunities that will attract visitors from beyond the local area;

(2) Contains resources which permit intensive recreational use by large numbers of people; and

(3) May be located in areas which have serious deficiencies in public outdoor recreation facilities, provided that state recreation areas should not be provided in lieu of municipal, county, or regional facilities.

(c) State recreation areas shall be administered by the commissioner of natural resources in a manner which is consistent with the purposes of this subdivision primarily to provide as broad a selection of opportunities for outdoor recreation as is consistent with maintaining a pleasing natural environment. Scenic, historic, scientific, scarce, or disappearing resources within state recreation areas shall be recommended for authorization as historic sites or designated scientific and natural areas pursuant to section [86A.08](#) to preserve and protect them. Physical development shall enhance and promote the use and enjoyment of the natural recreational resources of the area.

Subd. 4. State trail; purpose; resource and site qualifications; administration; designation. (a) A state trail shall be established to provide a recreational travel route which connects units of the outdoor recreation system or the national trail system, provides access to or passage through other areas which have significant scenic, historic, scientific, or recreational qualities or reestablishes or permits travel along an historically prominent travel route or which provides commuter transportation.

(b) No unit shall be authorized as a state trail unless its proposed location substantially satisfies the following criteria:

(1) Permits travel in an appropriate manner along a route which provides at least one of the following recreational opportunities:

(i) travel along a route which connects areas or points of natural, scientific, cultural, and historic interest;

(ii) travel through an area which possesses outstanding scenic beauty;

(iii) travel over a route designed to enhance and utilize the unique qualities of a particular manner of travel in harmony with the natural environment;

(iv) travel along a route which is historically significant as a route of migration, commerce, or communication;

(v) travel between units of the state outdoor recreation system or the national trail system; and

(2) Utilizes, to the greatest extent possible consistent with the purposes of this subdivision, public lands, rights-of-way, and the like; and

(3) Provides maximum potential for the appreciation, conservation, and enjoyment of significant scenic, historical, natural, or cultural qualities of the areas through which the trail may pass; and

(4) Takes into consideration predicted public demand and future use.

(c) State trails shall be administered by the commissioners of transportation or natural resources as specified by law in a manner which is consistent with the purposes of this subdivision. State trails established by the commissioner of natural resources shall be managed to provide a travel route through an area with a minimum disturbance of the natural environment and recognizing other multiple land use activities. Trail markers shall be limited to those providing safety information and interpretation.

(d) Facilities for the rest and comfort of trail users shall be provided primarily within units of the outdoor recreation system through which the trail passes. When additional facilities are required to insure the rest and comfort of the traveler, the managing agency may develop such facilities along the trail and shall designate the facilities as trail waysides. In addition to the foregoing purpose, trail waysides shall be developed for the preservation and interpretation of the trail's natural, historic, or scenic values, and may include facilities for primitive camping, picnicking, sanitation, and parking for access to the trail.

Subd. 5. State scientific and natural areas; purpose; resource and site qualifications; administration; designation. (Complete text available online – see above).

Subd. 6. **State wilderness area; purpose; resource and site qualifications; administration.** (Complete text available online – see above).

Subd. 7. **State forests and state forest subareas; purpose; resource and site qualifications; administration.** (a) A state forest, as established by section [89.021](#), shall be administered to accomplish the purposes set forth in that section, and a state forest subarea shall be established to permit development and management of specialized outdoor recreation at locations and in a manner consistent with the primary purpose of the forest.

(b) No unit shall be authorized as a state forest subarea unless it is located within a state forest and contains suitable natural resources to accommodate any of the following uses:

(1) Day use areas. Areas which permit recreational use of the forest in its natural state, not requiring an overnight stay, including but not limited to picnicking, fishing, swimming, boat launching, hiking, interpretation, and nature observation.

(2) Campground. Provide minimum facilities to accommodate overnight camping.

(c) Outdoor recreation subareas located within state forests shall be administered by the commissioner of natural resources in a manner which is consistent with the purposes of this subdivision.

Subd. 8. **State wildlife management area; purpose; resource and site qualifications; administration.** (Complete text available online – see above).

Subd. 9. **State water access site; purpose; resource and site qualifications; administration.** (Complete text available online – see above).

Subd. 10. **State wild, scenic, and recreational rivers; purpose; resource and site qualifications; administration; designation.** (Complete text available online – see above).

Subd. 11. **State historic sites; purpose; resource and site qualifications; administration; designation.** (Complete text available online – see above).

Subd. 12. **State rest area; purpose; resource and site qualifications; administration.** (Complete text available online – see above).

Subd. 13. **Additional parks; administration.** All other state parks which, though not meeting the resource and site qualifications contained in subdivisions 2 and 3, were in existence on January 1, 1984, shall be administered by the commissioner of natural resources as units of the outdoor recreation system.

Subd. 14. **Aquatic management areas.** (Complete text available online – see above).



Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
Division of Parks and Recreation